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ARMENIAN LEGENDS AND FESTIVALS

BY

LOUIS A. BOETTIGER, M.A.



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PREFACE

The author of the study which follows responded to the lure of his task for both theoretical and practical reasons. He seemed, because of his intimate personal relationship to Armenian life, to be peculiarly qualified to study and interpret a cross-section of that country's life. It is particularly urgent that we as Americans have authentic studies of Armenia and Armenian social life. Heretofore there has been a striking lack of such materials readily accessible in English. Because of the not inconsiderable immigration which reaches us from Armenia, and because also there has been a call for the United States to act as mandatory for this country under the peace treaty, we should penetrate more deeply into the Armenian heart than we have been able to do so far, if we are to carry through successfully our job either as assimilator or as friendly guardian. Moreover there is incumbent upon the United States in particular the duty of understanding a country like Armenia, since we have been foremost in proclaiming the doctrine of the rights of small nationalities. Those are the practical purposes from the standpoint of social politics which have given rise to and confer full warrant upon this study.

Of no less importance, however, is the contribution which Mr. Boettiger's study makes to theoretical sociology. He has sketched out for us the picture of a refractory culture which refuses to amalgamate with or yield to or be permeated by rival cultures. The social history of this sturdy people offers us a very clear-cut example of what really makes a society or a nation. Not mountains, not dynasties, not blood, but common interests, common traditions, common beliefs; in short, mental community.

The theoretical joins with the practical service of this study if it can strengthen our understanding that only as our own blood and that of our Armenian friends reach the place where they boil at the same temperature, or are cooled by the same application of reason, can we minister to each other or carry out the new partnership which may lie immediately ahead of us in the reestablishment of peace and a reorganization of world comity.

ARTHUR J. TODD

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ARMENIAN LEGENDS AND FESTIVALS

INTRODUCTION

The study which follows has a very definite objective apart from the mere gathering of materials, namely, to interpret as far as the subject-matter would permit, the social life of the Armenian people. The legends and festivals described have thus been selected from a larger mass of material with this principle in mind. I have, therefore, omitted such as seemed to me to be of little or no social value. Also, in full accordance with this plan, I have chosen to include certain church ceremonies which give rise to such festivals, and are of such social importance that I considered them an organic part of my subject. Otherwise I think I have kept within the strict confines as indicated by the title of this study.

It must, therefore, be evident that neither Part One on legends, nor Part Two on festivals, is exhaustive, and this is necessarily so, not only because of my selective plan, but also because much of the work on this and kindred subjects has been done by the French, and is available only on the continent. All of the sources used are, however, original in two possible constructions of the term; that is, they are the works of Armenians who have lived for many years in their native land, or of foreigners, generally French or English, who have traveled through the country and gathered their material first hand. A large portion of this matter I have been able to check up and add to through my wife, an Armenian, who lived in Constantinople most of her life, and who is naturally versed in the folk-lore of her native land. While this has been the chief source of my interest, it is not the only one, for during my three years' work in Beirut, Syria, I became acquainted with many Armenians.

To describe a legend, or a festival, and to tag it Armenian, is about as purposeful and enlightening as to explain Plato's idea of social unity to a person who has no picture of Greek civilization. I have, therefore, found it necessary to fit these legends and festivals into the particular settings that seemed to me most natural. The legends that date from pagan times are meaningless apart from their historical background; the church legends and festivals are without value apart from their religious-historical setting, while such legends as those of Ararat require a description of the natural environment to which they belong. The conclusions and interpretation which this study gives rise to, as well as the manner in which I have organized and attempted to weave the material together into a unified fabric, are my own.

Most of the books used have been supplied by the Case Memorial Library of Hartford Theological Seminary, and I owe the Reverend M. H.

Ananikian of that institution my thanks for his gracious coöperation in suggesting materials and providing me with them. I am also deeply indebted to Professor J. W. Beach for his painstaking criticism and valuable suggestions, and for the corrections and suggestions offered by Professor W. S. Davis and Professor A. E. Jenks. To Professor A. J. Todd I am especially grateful, for it was under his direction and supervision that this study was carried out.

LOUIS A. BOETTIGER

PART ONE
LEGENDS

CHAPTER I

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ARMENIA

Armenia is a huge plateau, a westward extension of the great Iranian highland, bounded by the Caucasus Mountains on the north, the Taurus Mountains and Kurdistan on the south, the Persian lowlands on the southeast, and the Black and Caspian seas. The average height of the plateau is 6,000 feet. As it ends abruptly at the Black Sea on one side, so on the other it breaks down in rugged terraces to the Mesopotamian lowlands; on the east it sinks gradually to the lower levels of Persia, and on the west to the plains of Asia Minor. The chief mountain ranges run from northeast to southwest, rising above the general level of the plateau to an altitude ranging from 8,000 to 12,000 feet and culminating in Ararat, the lofty summit of which stands 17,000 feet above sea level. Broad, elevated, and fertile valleys range themselves between the mountains, the main lines of which are determined by the four chief rivers of the country, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Aras, and the Kur. All four rise in the plateau, the two former emptying into the Persian Gulf, and the latter two into the Caspian Sea. The Euphrates divides the country into what is known as great and little Armenia, or Armenia major and Armenia minor, Armenia major on the east and Armenia minor on the west. Although the valleys are generally broad expanses of arable land, grass covered and treeless, the gorges of the Euphrates and Tigris can not be surpassed in grandeur and wildness. The winters are long and severe, and the summers short, dry, and hot. In the city of Erzerum the range of temperature is from -22° to 84° , and snow is usually present in June.¹

In consequence of the long and severe winters the villages are built on gentle slopes of the hillsides in which the houses are excavated. Robert Curzon, who traveled through the country about 1850, has written the best description of them.² A rectangular plot of ground about the size of an English acre is laid out and excavated to a depth of seven or eight feet at the back side, decreasing gradually with the slope of the hill to a depth of about two feet. After a careful leveling of the ground, trunks of straight trees are cut and arranged in rows for the support of the ceiling, which consists of cross-beams interspersed by a wooden frame-work upon which the removed soil is laid to a considerable thickness. The walls are made of stone. In entering the habitation at the lower slope of the hill-side, one is obliged to descend three or four steps to the outer door, which

¹ Detailed descriptions of geography and geology may be found in Lynch, *Armenia*; St. Martin, *Mémoire sur l'Arménie*, 2. Summary descriptions may be found in the New Schaff Herzog and Britannica encyclopedias.

² Robert Curzon, *Armenia*.

opens to a passage six to ten feet in length, at the end of which is a second door, constructed of wood like the first. This door swings to through the operation of a curious wooden weight passed over a kind of pulley, in order to keep the outside cold from entering the inner chamber. The inside of the door is usually covered with a rough, red-dyed goatskin. Directly before the inner door is a wooden platform raised some two feet above the ground and known in Turkish as the "Salamlik," the hall of reception of the head of the family. Chairs and tables it possesses none, only divans richly draped with Kurdish stuffs placed against the stone walls that bound the two sides of the platform. The floor is carpeted with tekeke, a kind of grey felt, and the walls are decorated with swords, knives, pistols, and other weapons. On the other two sides, the Salamlik is bounded by wooden rails to keep away the sheep and cattle which occupy the greatest proportion of floor space, and whose breathing helps materially to keep the chamber warm. The other members of the household are confined behind the stone wall where the space is sometimes split up into two or more chambers for the various families of the patriarchal household. One of these rooms is the common eating-room, and is provided with an open hearth, fireplace, and chimney which leans forward over the fireplace and draws up the smoke through a hole in the turf-covered roof. A great stone is placed over the chimney to keep children at play and grazing animals from falling through. In traveling through the country on horseback, particular care must be taken lest the horse step through an old chimney hole and break his leg. The windows are funnel shaped holes through the ceiling spanned with oiled paper.

Such is the Armenian household in which the people live day and night during eight winter months of the year in the coldest section of the country, as Erzerum and Mush. That many of the evenings were passed in listening to the tales and gossip of a wandering minstrel, or to the legends and folk-beliefs of the grey-haired members of the family, there can be no doubt. That the national tradition was passed on in this manner from the aged to the younger, to be again passed on in their turn, is a matter of as much certainty as that part at least of this same tradition has been preserved through the continually recurring storms of the passing centuries. The recounting of national legends and folk-lore is a chief means of amusement even in the warmer sections of the country, where the climate makes a free community life possible. How much more place, then, must it have had in these colder sections where only the head of the family ever left the household in winter-time, and then only in case of absolute necessity.

As has been suggested, this style of dwelling-place is not common to all parts of Armenia. In some places the houses are built entirely above ground, usually of stone, and sometimes, especially in the case of the poorer inhabitants, of mud. Though the winters are not so long or severe as in

the district of Erzerum, they are nevertheless sufficiently cold to require a fire six or seven months of the year. The characteristic feature of every living- and dining-room is the large "toneer" or circular fireplace dug out to a depth of three to four feet in the center of the room. Here the fire is built in the morning, usually with "tezek," the most common variety of fuel which is a sun-baked mixture of straw and sheep or cow dung. The bread is baked and the meals are cooked in the "toneer" and when it is time to eat, the members sit about the open space, letting their feet hang over the fire to keep warm. In the hut described by Montpèreux, there was but a single opening in the roof which served for window and chimney at the same time, and which was often carefully sealed up with straw to keep out the cold.³ This author has given a clear picture of the common family fireplace and sleeping chamber in which each person fell asleep as best he might upon rugs and skins, keeping as near the "toneer" as possible. And if the traditions, legends, and folk-lore that will make up the body of this thesis are the common possession of the people, as I have reason to believe them to be, in spite of drastic measures taken to suppress them, how better could they have been told and retold than while lounging about the "toneer" during long winter evenings before sleeping time?⁴

In what other respects the natural environment of the people moulded the common life, one can only conjecture. That the cold winters and deep river valleys have tended to the formation of isolated communities, clanishness, and provincialism, as is contended by some writers, has not generally been true. Tidal waves of conquering civilizations have passed over the country too frequently to make such an influence possible.⁵ Furthermore the people are bound together by a national religion, whose chief officials are chosen by the lay members and priesthood of the many communities.⁶ These representatives to the national religious assemblies return to their own people brimming with news and reports of political as well as religious and social matters. Such facts together with a common ancestry, a common tradition, and a common language have moulded a nation, and not a thousand differentiated groups among a people who were once a nation. They have tended to solidify and unify the national character, and it is just this process of solidification that gives significance to the whole fabric of beliefs, legends, and festivals of the people.

³ Dubois de Montpèreux, *Voyages* 3:400.

⁴ There is a belief that the toneer is sacred. "Nur der alte T'onir, der offen Backofen, der von den Irianiern entlehnt ist und am fünften Jahrhundert schon gebraucht wird, gilt überall in Armenien als heilig." Abeghian, *Der armenische Volksglaube* p. 3.

⁵ Surrounded as Armenia was with almost all of the ancient civilizations, including the Parthians, Scythians, Medes, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, she was inevitably involved in continual warfare, while the central situation of the territory made it a common stamping ground for hostile armies. Langlois 1:ix.

⁶ Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia* pp. 151-54.

As a nation, the Armenian people are exclusive, but this is an entirely different matter. For three years I have had occasion to observe groups of students belonging to different nations, chiefly Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, Jews, Persians, Turks, and Armenians, and the latter always showed a most persistent determination to confine their friendships and social intercourse to themselves. Perhaps this is due to the fact that nearly all of the nations above mentioned have at one time or another dominated the Armenians; perhaps it is due to the persecution they have recently suffered, which, though it has been a sufficiently important fact to result in serious social and psychological changes, has by no means been characteristic of the history of the people, as it has been, for example, of the Jews; or perhaps it is due to the solidarity and oneness of the people as a whole. I am inclined rather to the latter explanation, and may perhaps be able to prove it so.

Nevertheless, the singularity of the physical environment has placed its irremovable stamp upon the people. The words that best describe the country are not trees, hills, forests, gently flowing streams, such words as commonly express American landscape, but rather, gorges, mountain ranges, broad river valleys, treeless expanses of country. There is space to make one think of other worlds and other shores, and there are mountains suggestive of strength, that rise majestic above the plateau, to fill one with awe and wonder. Religious the people are naturally, but more than that, they are thoughtful, reflecting, considering. No writer that I have read but has spoken of the Armenian as intellectually alert and capable. That this thoughtfulness, this robust element in their idealism is in part the stamp of physical nature, there can be little doubt.

CHAPTER II

ANCIENT HISTORICAL LEGENDS

SECTION 1. THE LEGEND OF HAIC

Armenians do not call themselves Armenians nor their country Armenia. They are descendants of Haic, as the legend goes, who was the son of Togarmah, the son of Japhet, who was the son of Noah, and they call their country Haiasdan after the patriarchal progenitor of their people.¹ Haic dwelt in the plain of Shinar and was a prefect or director in the building of the tower of Babel. He was beautiful as a god and strong as a giant, mighty in battle and especially adept in spear throwing. In the days of his youth, Bel or Nimrod, who was the patron god of Babylon, established himself over all and wished to be worshipped. But Haic refused to obey, and taking his sons, who numbered about three hundred, his daughters, his sheep and cattle, he journeyed north until he came to the land of Ararat. Bel tried in vain to persuade his rival to come back.

"Thou hast departed and hast settled in a chill and frosty region," urged the Assyrian god. "Soften thy hard pride, change thy coldness to geniality; be my subject and come and live a life of ease in my domain."²

But Haic refused the cordial invitation, which so much angered Bel that the latter brought his army to force the Armenian hero into submission. Haic, however, was victorious, for he slew Bel with an arrow from his own bow. The place where Bel was buried is called "Kerezman," meaning grave, and is pointed out to this day. Armenians sing songs and tell stories of the great beauty and valor of Haic. He died at the age of four hundred in about 2028 B.C.³

This oldest of Armenian legends, quaint and simple as it is in accounting for the beginnings of a people, savours of the Old Testament and is suggestive of the Assyrian invasion which took place about the ninth century before Christ. It is significant that the Armenians refused the protection of Bel, and that in the very beginning of their legendary history, they insisted on standing firm and maintaining their independence, for no single quality is more characteristic of this people than a proud, haughty, even at times disdainful independence. It is also suggestive that their patriarchal hero was no saint, but a mighty giant, beautiful as he was strong, whose greatest pride was in the throwing of a spear, for his descendants have not been a peaceful people. To be sure, they were the first nation to be converted to Christianity, which would say little for

¹ Mar Apas Catina. *Langlois' Collection des Histoires de l'Arménie* 1:16.

² St. Martin, *Mémoire sur l'Arménie* 1:281.

³ Mar Apas Catina. *Langlois* 1:15-18.

Moses of Khorene. *Langlois* 3:63-64.

their firmness and independence, were it not that the priest with the cross was followed by a powerful king with a sword at the head of an army that had learned to fight as the Romans fought.⁴ The songs that were sung in memory and honor of Haic are seldom sung to-day unless it be in some remote village where the civilization of the Turk has not yet pressed, and there are few such villages if any. For many of them breathe of a national spirit not befitting a subject nation, and have been suppressed for many years.

SECTION 2. THE LEGEND OF ARA AND SEMIRAMIS

Dating back to the Assyrian invasion which took place during the seventh and eighth centuries before Christ, one of the oldest of Armenian legends, that of Semiramis, queen of Assyria, and Ara, king of Armenia, is told.⁵ Ara was very beautiful, and Semiramis having heard speech of his beauty for many years, wished to possess him. But she dared do nothing for fear of Ninus, protector over Armenia. After the death of Ninus, however, the queen sent messengers to Ara, with gifts and offerings, with prayers and promises of riches, begging him to come to her at Nineveh and either wed her and reign over all that Ninus had possessed, or fulfil her desire and return in peace to Armenia with many gifts. But when the messengers had been turned away repeatedly, Semiramis became angry, and taking her army she hastened to Armenia. The battle was fought on the plain of Ara, called after him Ararat; and although the queen had given careful orders to her generals to devise some means of saving the life of Ara, the Armenian king was slain. She found the dead body among the others that had fallen, and ordered her servants to place it in an upper chamber in her castle. And when the Armenian army again arose to drive away the foe and avenge the death of Ara, the

⁴ St. Martin 1:306.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1:282-3. Moses of Khorene 2:67-69.

Mar Apas Catina 1:26-27.

The first Arsacidæ king of Armenia, Valarsace, whose reign began in 149 B.C. found the kingdom in general disorder and was the first to organize the country along national lines. As a Parthian he was unacquainted with the history and institutions of the people, and desiring to build upon the established foundation, such as it was, he sent a Syrian scholar, Mar Apas Catina by name, with a letter to his brother, Arsace, king of Persia, requesting the latter to allow the Syrian access to the royal archives with the view of finding a history of Armenia. Mar Apas Catina found an old MS containing a history of ancient Armenia which bore the name of no author, and which was translated from Chaldean to Greek by order of Alexander the Great. It was translated into Syriac by the Syrian scholar for the benefit of Valarsace, but the MS has been lost, and there is not the slightest trace of it anywhere. It must have been in existence however, during the fifth century after Christ for Moses of Khorene used it as his only source for Armenia's ancient history, in writing his general history of Armenia. The old MS being lost, the translation by Mar Apas Catina and the first part of the history of Moses are given as identical to each other in Langlois' collection of Armenian historians. The ancient history contains the legends of Haic, of Ara and Semiramis, and of Vahakn, some of the songs of heroes, still sung, and other matter which is strictly speaking not historical. As a history, therefore, it is unreliable and unauthentic, but from the standpoint of the social historian it is invaluable, for a belief is as important a fact to sociology as the dethronement of a king is to history.

queen said, "I have commanded the gods to lick his wounds and he shall live again." She tried to bring Ara back to life by witchcraft and charms, but the body began to decay and she commanded her servants to cast the corpse into a deep pit and to cover it. And having dressed up one of her men in secret, she caused the following proclamation to be spread among the people: "The gods have licked Ara and have brought him back to life again, thus fulfilling our prayers and our pleasures. Therefore from this time forth shall they be the more glorified and worshipped by us, for they are the givers of joy and the fulfillers of desire." And she erected a statue to the gods, making it seem as though they had brought Ara back to life again. This news was spread over all the country of Armenia, and having satisfied the people, she put an end to the fighting. The twelve-year-old son of the king was taken by the Assyrian queen and appointed ruler over Armenia. She called him Ara, in memory of her love for Ara the Beautiful.

To Semiramis is attributed the building of the ancient city of Van on the shores of the beautiful lake of Van, where she made her summer residence until the time of her departure.⁶ She might well have lingered there, for the Armenians have a proverb, "Van in this world, paradise in the next." Nevertheless, Semiramis and Ara are mythical characters, although the latter is spoken of in the history of St. Martin as having lived along about 1769 B.C.⁷ As regards the popular belief in the legend, however, there is not the slightest doubt. This is proved by the fact that even to-day the city is called "Sham-iram-agerd" by the Armenians, meaning the city of Semiramis. Lynch says that Ara and Semiramis are Tannuz and Istar, the Adonis and the Aphrodite of the Hellenic myth, and that the quest of the Assyrian queen may be connected with the introduction into Armenia of the worship of Istar whose name is mentioned in one of the cuneiform inscriptions at Van.⁸ However, the results of modern scholarship are by no means conclusive on this point, as we shall see.

SECTION 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LEGEND OF ARA AND SEMIRAMIS

Moses' history was read by St. Martin who became exceedingly interested in Van, and in the cuneiform inscriptions spoken of. It was due to him that the French government dispatched a mission to Armenia in 1827, under the direction of a young German Professor, Friedrich Edward Schulz. Schulz was murdered by the Kurds, a thing which rarely happens in Armenia, and his work was left incomplete. He had succeeded, however, in making copies of forty-two inscriptions, which were published

⁶ Boyadjian, *Armenian Legends and Poetry* p. 33.

⁷ St. Martin 1:409.

⁸ Lynch 2:65.

in 1840, and proved to be remarkably accurate. Shortly afterward, orientalists made great discoveries in the Mesopotamian valley, but the inscriptions at Van did not tally with any syllabaries discovered up to that time, nor could they be translated in any known language. A number of them were found to be Assyrian, but the great majority were peculiar to Van, and entirely baffled the students. Not until 1880 were they finally unravelled. M. S. Guyard discovered at that time that the concluding phrase of many Vannic texts represented an imprecatory formula found in exactly the same place in Assyrian counterparts. This discovery enabled Professor Sayce, of Oxford, to decipher the inscriptions at a rapid rate.

Among the important facts discovered were that the nation was a rival nation of Assyria, and that its people were called Khaldeans, or children of Khaldis, much in the same way as the Assyrians reflected the name of their god, Assur. The country was a theocracy and Khaldis was supreme. In the tablets, his wrath was invoked against whomever should destroy them. The capital city was Dhuspus, modern Van, which is the Disp, or Tsp of Armenian writers, and the Turuspa of Assyrian annals. The Assyrians styled the kingdom Urardhu, or Urarthu, which is the name appearing in the Bible in the familiar form Ararat.

The earliest inscriptions date back to the ninth century before Christ, and as the language is neither Semitic nor Indo-European, the people could neither have been Assyrians whose language was Semitic, nor Armenians, whose language is Indo-European. The first mention made of Urardhu was in the reign of Ashur-Nazir-Pal (885-860 B.C.) whose successor, Shalmanasar II (860-825 B.C.) was the first Assyrian king to invade Armenia.⁹ Raffi, however, (the son of the famous Armenian poet) speaks of an account given by Assur-Nazir-Haban (1882-1857 B.C.) of one of his victories. "They" (i.e., the people of Ararat or Urarthu), he said, "fed to the impregnable mountains so that I might not be able to get at them, for the mighty summits were like drawn swords pointing to the skies. Only the birds of heaven soaring on their wings could reach them. In three days I was there spreading terror in places where they had taken refuge. Their corpses like autumn leaves filled the clefts. The rest escaped to distant inaccessible heights."¹⁰ This, clearly, is a much older record than any that Lynch found trace of, and although Raffi cites no authority for the quotation, I presume that it has been taken from a recent discovery. If this be true the Khaldeans were a very ancient people. One of the tablets shows that King Memas was the principal author of the magnificent canal which conducts the water of the river

⁹ Lynch, *Armenia*, chapter entitled "Van."

¹⁰ Raffi, article in Boyadjian's *Armenian Legends and Poetry* p. 125.

Khoshab to the suburbs of Van, and which is to-day called "Shamiram-Su" or river of Semiramis.¹¹ The line of Vannic kings is traceable as far down as 644 B.C.

Most of these inscriptions are to be found on a huge isolated rock, situated in the curve of the bay, and known as the "rock of Van."¹² Among them are inscriptions left by Xerxes (485 B.C.), the Persian conqueror whose father's empire (Darius, 521-486 B.C.) succeeded the loose Scythian rule.

But the ancient Khaldean kingdom had already vanished when Xerxes' victorious army overran the country, for shortly after the great influx of Scythians and the break-up of Assyria, came another horde from the west, perhaps to fill up the void left by the Scythian ravages. It is at this time that the Armenian people are first heard from, and it is this horde, therefore, that is regarded as the foundation stock of the Armenian people. They seem to have been an Indo-European people residing in the territory north of the Black Sea, for, coming from the west they must have entered Asia from Europe by crossing the straits. The ancient Khaldeans were assimilated to some extent, but for the most part, they were driven to the north and south, where they have left traces that have been recognized and recorded by Xenophon and Herodotus.¹³

That the civilization and culture of the ancient Khaldeans were utilized is beyond doubt. Their most ancient cities, Van, Armavir, were foundations of Vannic kings, while recently it has been disclosed that the city of Hajk, southeast of Van, shows some of the familiar features of a Khaldean settlement. But their supreme god during the pre-Christian era was not Khaldis, but the Persian Ormuzd, which indicates that the Persians exercised an even greater influence.

How then could Semiramis ever have come to Van in quest of an Armenian king, since it seems that the Scythians had already conquered Assyria before the great influx of Armenian hordes? Nor does it seem that the city of Van was built by the Assyrian queen, for the inscriptions make no mention of her name. King Memas who, in the view of Lynch, constructed the famous canal, was in all probability the author of the garden city. The belief, according to Lynch, as already stated, is that this legend is the Armenian version of the old Hellenic myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, taken over during the domination of the Seleucid dynasty which followed the conquest of Alexander about 325 B.C.¹⁴

But this is unreasonable. That a myth should be taken over by a subject people and the characters rechristened is not difficult to understand,

¹¹ Lynch, chapter on Van.

¹² Moses of Khorene 2:69.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lynch 2:65.

but that the name of one of them should be applied to the ancient city is very improbable to say the least. Furthermore, the legend is flavored rather strongly with Persian voluptuousness, and is not at all suggestive of Greek delicacy and refinement. Nor is the fact that the horde overran the country after the destruction of Assyria in any way conclusive, for if there were any assimilation at all, as there must unquestionably have been, the Khaldean culture and history was to that extent the actual possession of the Armenians. Even intermarriage would perhaps be unnecessary, for what Irishman who has been in the United States two months does not speak of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington as his forefathers? It is to be noted also that to this day the canal spoken of is called "Shamiram-Su" or river of Semiramis, by all Armenians.¹⁵ On the whole it seems to me conclusive, therefore, that the legend of Semiramis and Ara has its roots in Armenian history, and is not at all a version of the Hellenic myth.

SECTION 4. THE LEGEND OF VAHAKN

The legend of Vahakn, king and god of Armenians, is very clearly attributable to the Greek period, which followed the Persian conquest under Xerxes. Vahakn was deified because of his great valor and made the fire-god of the Armenian people.¹⁶ He was called "Vishapakagh," uprooter of dragons, since he cleared Armenia of monsters and saved it from evil influences. His exploits were known in the abode of the gods as well as in Armenia. The most famous of them was the theft of corn from the barns of King Barsham of Assyria, from whom he ran away and tried to hide in heaven. Because of the ears he dropped in his rapid flight, there arose the Milky Way which is called in Armenian the "track of the corn stealer."¹⁷

Moses of Khorene writes as follows:

Concerning the birth of this king the legends say,

"Heaven and earth were in travail,
And the crimson waters were in travail,
And in the water, the crimson reed
Was also in travail.
From the mouth of the reed issued smoke,
From the mouth of the reed issued flame,
And out of the flame sprang the young child,
His hair was of fire, a beard had he of flame,
And his eyes were suns."¹⁸

¹⁵ Moses of Khorene 2:68, 69.

¹⁶ St. Martin 1:285.

¹⁷ Raffi p. 129. Abeghian pp. 49, 50.

¹⁸ Moses of Khorene 2:76. Translation from Moses, Boyadjian p. 10.
Mar Apas Catina 1:40.

With our own ears did we hear these words sung to the accompaniment of the harp. They sing moreover that he did fight with the dragons, and overcame them; and some say that his valiant deeds were like unto Hercules. Others declare that he was a god, and that a great image of him stood in the land of Georgia, where it was worshipped, with sacrifices.¹⁹

The wife of Vahakn was Astghik, the goddess of beauty, a personification of the moon, corresponding to the Phoenician and Sidonian Astarte. This is suggestive of Greek influence, for Venus, the Greek goddess of beauty, was also the wife of a fire-god, Vulcan.²⁰

The flight of Vahakn before the Assyrian king is certainly more suggestive of the fear in which the Assyrians must have been regarded than of the valor of their god. The originators of the legend were good psychologists, however, in regarding the instincts of fear and of pugnacity as compatible. For even the slayer of demons must some day face his superiors in strength, and when he does, will he not be afraid? In fact he would be more afraid than another, for he could not well impute more mercy to his superior than he himself had shown to his inferiors.

The vein of humor is too rich to be left unnoted. If the Greeks could laugh at their gods, and even mock them, the Armenians could also make sport of them. For what could be more delightfully humorous than the picture of a bearded god, a slayer of dragons, whose hair was of flame and whose eyes like suns, stealing corn from the Assyrian king and dropping the ears from his shoulders in his hasty flight across heaven? The character thus brought out, together with the richness of imaginative quality, especially in the song of his birth, the wholesome and unveiled anthropomorphism (wholesome because it is unveiled), and the correspondence between the Greek fire-god Vulcan whose wife was Venus, the goddess of beauty, with the fire-god Vahakn whose wife Astghik was also goddess of beauty, stamp the legend with its unmistakable origin in Greek mythology.

SECTION 5. THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE LEGEND OF VAHAKN

The Greek period from which this legend dates began with the defeat of the Armenian king Vahy, who was overcome by Alexander the

¹⁹ Mar Apas Catina 1:41. Moses of Khorene p. 76.

Moses of Khorene, called the Herodotus of Armenia, has written the best known history of the Armenian people. The work has been translated into Latin, Italian, French, German, and Russian. Moses lived in the fifth century, two centuries after the conversion of the nation to Christianity. He belonged to the second order of translators in the school of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob, and was sent to Syria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome in order to complete his studies. Upon returning to his country he found everything in disorder. St. Sahag and St. Mesrob were dead, the king had been overthrown, and he chose the life of solitude. Sometime later he was chosen bishop and requested by an Armenian prince, Sahag Bagratide, to write a history of his country, which task he took up with great enthusiasm. The translation of Mar Apas Catina was his only source for Armenian ancient history. He carefully differentiates hearsay from fact, never fails to stamp a fable or legend as such, and generally quotes his authorities where he has them. Considering the limitation of his materials, and the time in which he wrote, Moses wrote a really remarkable book, although the verdicts of a few critics have been unfavorable.

²⁰ Raffi p. 129.

Great somewhere about 328 B.C.²¹ The Greeks chose their own representative to rule over the province, who at the time of Alexander's death was Seleucus. Historians have taken the name of this governor to indicate the dynasty of Greek supremacy which followed; i.e., the Seleucid dynasty. This method of the Greeks of selecting their own man to govern a subject people, which was of course in pursuance of their policy of superimposing their own culture upon all subject nations, was contrary to the policy of the Parthians, Romans, and Persians, who allowed the Armenians to maintain their national independence provided they permitted the use of their armies and duly paid their taxes. And it is this policy of the Greeks that accounts for the fact that large portions of Greek mythology and religion were taken over by the Armenians.

Although the period of political supremacy was short-lived, the influence of Greek culture continued to permeate the social life of the people through the reign of the Arsacid kings.²² In 246 B.C. Arsaces, a Parthian, made himself master of the Parthians, Persians, Medes, Babylonians, and lastly Armenians.²³ His grandson, Arsaces the Great, conquered as far as India, and after seating himself securely upon the throne of Persia, placed his brother Valarsace upon the Armenian throne, so founding the Persian and Armenian Arsacid dynasties (150 B.C.).²⁴ The Persian Arsacidae became extinct in A.D. 226 when they were overthrown by the Persian Sasanidae, whereas the Armenian Arsacidae line continued up until A.D. 428, when the Armenian kingdom was divided between Persia and Rome by Shapuh, the Persian monarch, and Theodosius II.²⁵ This makes a period of 578 years (150 B.C.-A.D. 428) during which Armenia was governed by her own line of kings, and enjoyed the liberties of national independence. To be sure after the conquest of Lucullus and Pompey (66 B.C.) Armenia became tributary to Rome, but the right of succession remained with the Armenian royal family, even during Roman supremacy, so that the national life was in no manner interfered with.²⁶

²¹ Lidgett, *An Ancient People*. St. Martin 1:409. Mar Apas Catina p. 41.

²² The influence of Greek culture is chiefly indicated by the fact that the pagan divinities were Greek and that many temples were erected to these gods and goddesses all over the country. (Agathange, *Histoire du Règne de Tiridate*. Langlois 1:164-70.) Secondly, there were formed by St. Sahag and St. Mesrob in the fifth century after the conversion of the nation to Christianity, schools of translators, who studied in Greece, Egypt, and Rome and whose chief works were translations from the Greek. With the conversion (301) came the necessity for a written language, the characters of which were invented by St. Mesrob in 404. Thereupon were organized the schools of translators whose chief study of necessity was Greek, and whose translations and original works have given to the fifth century the title of "Golden Age of Armenian Literature." (Langlois 1:xxi-xxvi, 2:vii.)

²³ St. Martin 1:288, 289. Mar Apas Catina 1:41.

Moses of Khorene 2:81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 3:393.

Moses of Khorene 2:155.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 88, 89.

The greatest Armenian king of the Arsacidae line was Tigranes the Great, who extended his domains by conquest and established himself in his capital, Tigranacerta, with a court of matchless splendor.²⁷ He is spoken of by historians as a king of kings, and as having ruled with a pomp, splendor, and pride never before known. Defeated by Pompey within the walls of his own capital city, his kingdom became tributary to Rome.

SECTION 6. THE PERIOD OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The continuity of the period of the Armenian Arsacidae makes it the time when the process of national solidification and unification was carried out to the point that made Armenia a nation, and beyond this point. Raffi asserts that the introduction of Greek culture during the Arsacid dynasty not only changed the religion of Armenians, but also so affected their language and customs that they became different from the Persians, which is proof that a process of social readjustment was going on.²⁸ It was during this period that the wandering minstrels spoken of by Langlois journeyed from one end of the nation to the other, singing their songs, repeating the national legends, relating the news of the world and the court gossip which probably made up the largest portion of it.

Les chants de l'antique Arménie rappellent principalement des événements, la plupart héroïques et légendaires, accomplis à des époques très différentes, ce qui donne à penser qu'ils ont dû être composés à diverses reprises, par des rhapsodes dont les noms ne nous sont point parvenus. Les sujets traités dans ces chants démontrent clairement qu'ils n'ont été inspirés ni à des prêtres païens, ni à des poètes qui auraient vécu sous leur influence, en vue d'être recités dans des fêtes religieuses ou en face des autels. Au contraire, on reconnaît de prime abord que ces chants sont l'œuvre de bardes nationaux, ayant un libre accès dans les palais des souverains et à la cour des satrapes. C'est ce qui fait supposer que ces poèmes sont peut-être dûs à des minstrels, à la solde des rois et des nobles et ayant pour emploi de célébrer leurs vertus et leurs prouesses.²⁹

This is putting the case conservatively, for Moses speaks often of "les chantres" and "les chants." They traveled as far as Persia and returned, for it is related by the Italian Countess Evelyn Martinengo how a wandering minstrel, who had just returned from that country, was entertained by an Armenian patriarchal family living in the kind of underground

²⁷ St. Martin 1:291. Moses of Khorene p. 88.

²⁸ Raffi p. 126.

²⁹ Langlois 1:ix, x. These songs of which Moses of Khorene very frequently speaks are classified by Langlois into songs of the first order, the second order, and the third order. The first are relative to the prowess of Armenian kings and gods; the second concern a long series of military exploits accomplished against the Assyrians, Medes, and Persians; the third refer especially to traditions in connection with the Assyrians. The birth-song of Vahakn is an illustration of the songs of the first order (p. x, xi). Flint in his *History of the Philosophy of History*, p. 42, speaks of this period of minstrelsy as necessarily preceding the use of letters everywhere. "The myth and legend interest primitive man more than real fact. His vision is more largely of the imagination than of the sense of judgment. It is an error to regard the rude minstrelsy which generally preceded the use of letters as essentially historical."

habitation described in the beginning of this thesis.³⁰ No one was ever more welcome than the minstrel. He was assigned to the guest chamber usually prepared especially for him, and always the best chamber in the household. His head and feet were washed for him by the wife of the patriarch, and at meal time all the delicacies of the household were spread before him. All guests were welcome, but no guest more welcome than the minstrel. They must have listened to his tales in a kind of petrified awe, and heard him sing his songs in speechless enjoyment.

It was a practice among the minstrels of the time to compete with each other in public, and it is related how two minstrels entertained by a Persian prince were led out upon an open grass plot and seated, one facing the other. Five thousand people made a circle around the competitors while the rivals contended in song and verse, riddle and repartee. Each began where the other left off, until finally one failed to perceive the drift of his adversary, and answering at random, the spectators proclaimed him beaten. The triumphant bard was led to the vanquished, whose lyre was taken from him and broken. Robed in a prince's mantle, the victor was taken to the highest seat in the banquet hall.

That the people were the judges of the contest, indicates how well they must have been acquainted with the current folk-songs, legends, and tradition. How generally and frequently the custom of minstrel competition was practiced throughout Armenia is not known, but it certainly is proof, besides Moses' own statements to the same effect, that the national legends and folk-songs were the possession of the common people. And what is more important, this same body of legends, folk-songs, and tradition did more than any other one thing to weld the sentiments of the people into a single national sentiment, which crystallized into a real patriotism, a real loyalty and devotion to any cause that was a national cause, because it was the natural, spontaneous expression of the life and thought of the people, and no mean, artificial thing superimposed from outside.³¹

There are other reasons for giving this period the social importance that I have ascribed to it. The conversion of the people to Christianity about the third century after Christ was achieved in no sentimental fashion, but, as I believe, in a manner in which it alone could have been done, namely, at the point of the sword of their own king, Tiridates, who was converted from paganism to Christianity by Gregory the Illuminator. The traditions in connection with this important event will be told later. Suffice it to say at this point that the whole process of conversion was carried out so thoroughly and completely, that it may be described as a national volte-face, and therefore did not result in the disintegration,

³⁰ Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco, *Essays in the Study of Folk-Songs*, chapter on Armenia.

³¹ The battle of Avarair under the leadership of the celebrated Vartan, where Armenia defended her national ideals against the intrusion of Persia, is proof of this.

civil strife, and social chaos that would unquestionably have been the result had the process been carried out by means of peaceful penetration and propaganda.

The third and last argument in support of the social and national importance of the period of the Arsacid kings is in respect to the alphabet which was compiled by St. Mesrob Maschtotz. St. Mesrob was a former secretary of the king, and desired to extirpate the last remnants of paganism in the province of Akoulis, but in the absence of an alphabet he was unable to carry out any scheme of propaganda. He therefore besought the king, Vramschapouh, to put an end to this state of things and the latter, in response to the request, placed all available material at the disposal of the saint. The task was accomplished in 404, somewhat at the expense of the future devotees of the language, for the alphabet contains thirty-eight letters.³² Nevertheless, most of the sounds of foreign languages were represented, making it particularly useful as a foundation language for other languages. St. Mesrob, with a body of translators trained by himself and St. Sahak, then proceeded to the translation of the Bible, which was not completed until 433. Liturgies and song-books quickly followed. To be sure the effect of the invention of the alphabet and the distribution of the various religious publications that followed were not felt during the period of the Arsacidae, for the Bible was not published until after the break-up of the kingdom in 428, when it was divided between Persia and Rome. But the important point is that the time had come when the need for an alphabet was making itself very strongly felt, and this could not have been true of a diversified, heterogeneous population.

For the three reasons above mentioned, i.e., first, the work of minstrels, second, the Christianizing of the nation, and third, the invention of the alphabet, all occurring during the successive reigns of the Arsacid kings, I should ascribe to this period (150 B.C.-A.D. 428) the integration of the Armenian people into a national unit.³³ Christianity must have come as a disrupting force, as a terrible shock, necessitating a complete social readjustment, but the fact that the readjustment was made shows that the people were ready for it. For better or for worse the yoke of Christianity was fastened to the neck of the people, and with it they had to

³² Ormanian p. 22. Moses of Khorene p. 158.

³³ There are further proofs that may be cited. The history of English and French literature shows that the golden age of their literature followed a period of social integration along national lines. And it is true that the golden age of Armenian literature dawned with the closing decades of the Arsacidae dynasty, and continued several decades beyond. And finally, when Valarsace, the first Arsacidae, ascended the throne of Armenia, finding everything in a state of disorder, he organized the country along national lines. Dividing the kingdom into provinces he placed his governors at the heads of them; he organized a standing army, appointed guardians of the granaries, established courts of justice, a royal guard, and minutely regulated court life. What is most interesting is that he appointed two reporters, one to remind him in his anger, "le bien à faire," the other to remind him of the necessity for doing justice. *Ibid.* pp. 82-85.

replow the social soil. The job was a good one, for the Armenian church has been the chief power during the last ten or fifteen centuries in keeping alive the streams of national life, and in holding the people together in the face of invasion and repeated attempts at proselytization by the Persians and by the Greek and Roman Catholic churches.

SECTION 7. LEGENDS OF ARTASCHES AND ARTAVASD

The legends of Artasches and Satenik, and of Artavasd, the son of Artasches, belong to the Arsacid period, for Artavasd and Artasches are Armenian kings of the Arsacid dynasty, according to Moses.³⁴ The Alans who, according to the legend, were a neighboring people residing in the mountain region in the vicinity of Georgia, spread themselves over Armenia while Artasches, the Armenian king, collected a great army and forced the Alans to retreat across the river Kur where they pitched camp. The son of the Alan king was taken captive and brought to Artasches, which forced the former to seek peace on whatever terms the Armenian king might wish, provided only his son was returned in safety. But Artasches refused, whereupon the sister of the captured boy came to the river bank, and standing upon a great rock spoke to the camp of Artasches by means of interpreters saying: "Oh brave Artasches, who hast vanquished the great nation of Alans, unto thee I speak. Come, hearken unto the bright-eyed daughter of the Alan king and give back the youth. For it is not the way of heroes to destroy life at the root, nor for the sake of humbling and enslaving a hostage to establish everlasting enmity between two great nations."³⁵ Artasches, having heard of these sayings went to the river bank and having seen that the girl was beautiful, and listened to her words of wisdom, wished to marry her. His chamberlain considered it a wise stroke of policy, and therefore went to the Alan king, soliciting the hand of the princess for his master, whose oaths and assurances of peace he vouched for, together with the promise to return the boy. The king of the Alans answered, "From whence shall brave Artasches give thousands upon thousands, and ten thousands upon tens of thousands in return for the maiden?"

Writes Moses:

Concerning this, the poets of that land sing in their songs:

"Brave King Artasches
Mounted his fine black charger,
And took the red leatheren cord
With the golden ring.
Like a swift winged eagle
He passed over the river
And cast the golden ring
Round the waist of the Alan Princess;

³⁴ St. Martin 1:300. Moses of Khorene pp. 105-6.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 106.

Causing much pain to the tender maiden
As he bore her swiftly back to his camp."

Which being interpreted meaneth that he was commanded to give much gold, leather, and crimson dye in exchange for the maiden. So also they sing of the wedding:

"It rained showers of gold when Artasches became a bridegroom,
It rained pearls when Satenik became a bride."

For it was the custom of our kings to scatter coins amongst the people when they arrived at the doors of the temple for their wedding, as also for the queens to scatter pearls in their bride-chamber.³⁶

The couplet quoted is still sung by the Armenians, and it is still customary for the bridegroom to scatter money on his way to the church, and though it may be for queens to scatter pearls, the Armenian bride is not to be outdone. She is given a partly opened pomegranate which she throws at the door of the bridegroom upon the arrival at the bridegroom's home after the ceremony at the church, the bits of pomegranate scattering themselves about as pearls.

After fifty-one years of a very prosperous reign, Artasches, who was very much beloved by his people, died. The funeral procession was a most magnificent one, and many of the people killed themselves, out of love for their dead king, according to the custom of the time. And when the body was laid in the grave they threw precious jewels, gold, and silver after it. Nor did the lamenting and suicide stop after his burial, for upon the grave of their dead king the nobles and the people continued to kill themselves. So great was the slaughter that Artavasd, son of Artasches, and king after his father's death, addressed the spirit of his dead father, saying, "Behold, thou art taking all with thee; dost thou leave me to rule over ruins and the dead?" The words given by Moses of Khorene are: "Now that thou art gone, and hast taken with thee the whole land, how shall I reign over the ruins?"³⁷ Whereupon the spirit of Artasches cursed him and said,

"When thou ridest forth to hunt
Over the free heights of Ararat,
The strong ones shall have thee,
And shall take thee up
On to the free heights of Ararat.
There shalt thou abide,
And never more see the light."³⁸

³⁶ Boyadjian p. 49. Moses of Khorene p. 106. Moses as translated by Langlois, relates the story as legend, for after telling the tale, and quoting the songs he writes, "Voici maintenant le fait dans toute sa vérité: comme le cuir rouge est très-estimé chez les Alains, Artaschés donne beaucoup de peaux de cette couleur, et beaucoup d'or en dot, et il obtient la jeune princesse Satenig. C'est là la lanière de cuir rouge garnie d'anneaux d'or. Ainsi dans les noces, ils chantent des légendes, en disant,

'Une pluie d'or tombait
Au mariage d'Artaschés;
Les perles pleuvait
Aux noces de Satenig.'

Moses likewise relegates the legend and songs of Artavasd to their proper places.

³⁷ Moses of Khorene p. 111.

³⁸ Translation from Moses by Boyadjian p. 65.

These words together with those of Artavasd spoken to his father's spirit were sung by the singers of the time.³⁹

One day while out hunting Artavasd was seized by some visionary terror and lost his reason. Urging his horse down a steep bank he fell into a chasm where he sank and disappeared. Old women told how he was confined in a cavern and bound with iron chains which his two dogs gnawed at daily in order to set him free. But somehow at the sound of the hammers striking on the anvils, the chains were continually strengthened, and it was customary among the blacksmiths of the time to strike the anvil three or four times to strengthen, as they said, the chains of Artavasd. And so the tradition was kept up by singers and blacksmiths; the blacksmiths and old women having consigned the jealous king to the world's nethermost regions, while the singers left him to the solitude of Ararat in accordance with the curse of Artasches.

SECTION 8. CONCLUSIONS

Such are the ancient legends of Armenia, in their respective historical settings: the legends of Haic, of Semiramis and Ara, of Vahakn, of Artasches and Satenik, and of Artavasd. All of them antedate the Christian era, and some of them by many centuries. Each one of them is told by Moses of Khorene. But as to origin and probable historic roots Moses was silent, for he was writing a history. He constantly laments the absolute dearth of material and sources and begins his accounts of these legends with the words "This is as it is told," or "the singers say," indicating that his only sources for them were the songs and reports current among the people during his own time. The legends of Haic and of Semiramis and Ara are told by Moses as though he believed them historic fact, but of course Moses had no materials to serve as a basis of criticism. He is careful to quote Mar Apas Catina as his only source for this material. The other three legends are regarded as such. Artavasd is spoken of as an historical king who lost his reason while riding horseback and fell into a deep chasm. The practice of suicide at the death of Artasches, his father, was a pagan custom. The curse of the spirit of the dead father, the chains, the dogs, and the anvils were of course recognized as the work of ingenious fancy. In view therefore, of the questionable character of Moses' sources these legends have very little historic value. They do, however, have a high social value inasmuch as the common knowledge of them among the people was the only ultimate source at the disposal of the historian.

The second conclusion is that these legends formed a very important part of the larger mass of tradition and songs that served to cement

³⁹ Moses of Khorene p. 111.

the people into a nation. Just how important, it would be difficult to say, but the fact that they were current at the time Moses wrote indicates that they were current and passed on from generation to generation during the whole period of the Arsacidae kings. And as the people had no alphabet during this whole period, they must have been passed on by song and word of mouth. This was a time of special activity on the part of the minstrels and singers, and therefore the development of the national consciousness characteristic of the period must have been brought about in a large measure through the medium of these legendary beliefs.

Furthermore these legends are known by the Armenian people today and are taught in the schools that are not too severely under the rules of Turkish and Russian censorship. Naturally enough, they are a source of great pride since they breathe national independence and loyalty. But of course, the Turks and Russians have suppressed all public singing of songs, and public teaching of history and legend that may possibly be construed as partaking of the national spirit.

It may be argued that these legends slumbered between the covers of Moses' history during the centuries known as the dark ages, and that they had no social value until the contagion of the European spirit of the Renaissance awoke the legends and the people at the same time. But the mere dearth of record is no proof of this Rip Van Winkle theory. There is at least one reliable authority sufficient to disprove it, viz., Grigor Magistros, a scholar of the eleventh century who wrote that he heard the Artashes epic sung by minstrels.⁴⁰ Besides the unreasonableness of the supposition, there is the added fact of an independent Armenian kingdom known as the Bagradouni dynasty, whose capital seat was at the famous city of Ani. This kingdom included greater Armenia and continued from A.D. 887 to 1079.⁴¹ But 1079 does not mark the end of Armenian independence though it marks the destruction of Ani, for Reuben, a member of the royal family, made his way into Cilicia in the year 1080, and rallying a handful of Armenians about him, overpowered the Greeks and founded what is known as the Rupenian Kingdom of Cilicia, which continued during a period of 300 years. So that here again is a period of very nearly five hundred years (889-1380), during which time the Armenian people enjoyed national political independence.⁴² And this during the very period of the dark ages, about which we know so little! We could not, therefore, for a moment suppose the traditions and legends to have had no social importance during these centuries, for such an assumption would be in flat contradiction to the witness of Grigor Magistros, and to the facts of Armenian history.

⁴⁰ Raffi p. 42.

⁴¹ St. Martin 1:appendix.

⁴² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III

LEGENDS OF THE CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

SECTION 1. PRE-CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION

The second body of legends which I wish to consider is chiefly concerned with the introduction of Christianity into the country. These, together with the traditional beliefs centered about the chief geographical feature of the land, Mt. Ararat, constitute a group bearing a very distinct religious stamp. For this reason, and also because they have a later origin, they are to be marked off very distinctly from those already taken up. In view of their religious bearing I shall introduce them with a brief account of the various forms of pagan worship that preceded the Christianization of the people.

The chief religious influences have been the Assyrian, the Persian, and the Greek. It seems, however, that a kind of monotheism prevailed before the gods of any of these were taken over. The very ancient Armenian kings planted groves of poplars around their cities and the worship was carried on in these groves.¹ An altar was placed among the trees, where the first male descendant of the royal family (and perhaps other families) offered sacrifices to the one God, while the priests derived oracles from the rustling of the leaves. Even now the poplar groves are held in uncommon regard. This is a survival of the old belief that they were the dwelling place of God, and of the later practice of consecrating children in them. The belief that God dwelt among the leaves must have been suggested by the slightest trembling of the leaves, even at the gentlest breeze, and one can well imagine the people looking up at them in the impressive silence of the forest with an awe and wonder no other environment could possibly induce. The Armenian for poplar, "Sossi" is used to-day as a name for girls, and the poplar tree, although not held sacred by Armenian people to-day, is certainly regarded with great reverence.²

The influence of Persian worship is more clear. Aramazd, the architect of the universe, lord and creator of all things, was the chief

¹ Clark, *New Englander* 22:507, 672.
Raffi p. 127.

² That trees are worshipped even to-day, and that certain superstitions are bound up with them is clearly shown by Abeghian. "In den Gegenden Armeniens, wo das Land mit Wäldern bedeckt ist, werden viele sehr alte und grosse Bäume für heilig gehalten und ähnlicher Weise wie die Quellen verehrt. Man brennt vor ihnen Lichter, Weihrauch, opfert ihnen Hähne und Hammel, küsst sie, kriecht durch ihren gespaltenen Stamm durch, oder lässt magere Kinder durch ihre Löcher schlüpfen, um die Einwirkung der bösen Geister aufzuhoben. Man glaubt dass vom Himmel Lichter auf die heiligen Bäume kommen, oder Heilige sich auf denselben aufhalten. Auch die Bäume geben Gesundheit, einige heilen alle Krankheiten. . . . Um von Bäumen Heilung zu bekommen soll man ein Stück von seiner Kleidung abreißen und damit den Baum umwickeln oder es auf den Baum nageln. Man glaubt dadurch seine Krankheit auf den Baum zu übertragen." Abeghian pp. 58, 59.

Armenian god, and is unquestionably the Persian Ormuzd named in the inscription of Xerxes on the rock of Van. Armenians have given him the title of "father of the gods," and the qualifications "great, and strong, creator of heaven and earth, and god of fertility and of abundance." The Greeks identified him with Zeus.³ There were numerous sanctuaries erected in his honor, and at the annual festival celebrated in his name, white animals, especially goats, horses, and mules, were sacrificed and their blood used to fill silver and golden goblets.⁴ Tir, or "Grogh" meaning in Armenian "to write" was his attendant spirit, whose chief business it was to watch over mankind, recording their good and evil deeds.⁵ Upon the death of a person "Grogh" conducted the soul of the departed before his master, who opened the great book, and balancing the good and evil deeds, assigned a reward or punishment. Grogh is also the personification of hope and fear, and the expression "may Grogh take you" is still very commonly used among the people, especially by servant girls and those whose language has not undergone the purification of a season of "Sturm und Drang." It is interesting to note that this and some other expressions owe their survival to usage among women rather than among men, which is not difficult of explanation when one considers the social restrictions that women are generally subject to. "Viele Seiten des alten heidnischen Glaubens sind in dem heutigen Volksglauben, besonders bei den tiefer stehenden Volksschichten, bei alten Bauerinnen, als überbleibsel der Vergangenheit erhalten."⁶

The god Mihr represented fire, and was the son of Aramazd.⁷ He guided heroes in battle, and was commemorated by a festival held in the beginning of spring. Fires were kindled in the open market place in his honor, and a lantern lit from one of these fires was kept burning in his temple throughout the year.⁸ It is still a festival among the people, although it has a different significance, and will be described more in detail later on. This is practiced not only by the Armenians, but also by the Syrian Maronites who reside in the Lebanon. I have seen the mountainsides literally aglow with a thousand fires in celebration of a Christian festival that has its roots in the pagan ceremony in honor of Mihr. The practice of a continually burning lantern was also carried over by some branches of the Christian church.

³ Agathangelus p. 127. Emin, *Recherches sur le Paganisme Arménien* p. 9.

⁴ Raffi, article in Boyadjian's *Armenian Legends and Poetry*.

⁵ Tir is mentioned only once by Agathangelus (p. 164) and he is not mentioned by any other Armenian writers (Langlois 1:164). Emin compares him to the Greek Hermes or Mercury, probably because Agathangelus speaks of him as the recorder or reporter of Aramazd. (Emin p. 20, note 1.)

⁶ Abeghian p. 4.

⁷ He corresponds to the Persian Mithra and is hence of Persian origin and not Greek. The Greek translation of Agathangelus regards him as analogous to Vulcan, which Emin considers to be incorrect. (Agathangelus p. 168; Emin p. 20.)

⁸ Raffi, article in Boyadjian's *Armenian Legends and Poetry*.

Sekleman's *Tales*. Preface by Blackwell.

Both Persians and Armenians were worshippers of Mihr (fire-worship), although there was a very distinct difference between the two. The Armenian sacred fire was invisible, whereas the Persian was material and kept up throughout the whole year. It is for this reason that the Armenians called the Persians fire-worshippers. The only visible fire-god worshipped by the Armenians was the sun, to which temples were dedicated, and after which the Armenian calendar month "Areg" was named.⁹ The "Children of the Sun" as they were called, offered the most persistent opposition to the introduction of Christianity, and a community of them continued their worship in the face of persecution after Christianity became the religion of the state. The phrase "let me die for your sun," and the oath "let the sun of my son be witness," are language survivals of this particular worship.

The Greek worship, introduced first during the Seleucid dynasty, and emphasized and encouraged by the line of Arsacidae kings up to the introduction of Christianity, exercised an even stronger influence than the Persian. Many of the Greek divinities were rechristened and adopted by the people. Chief of these was Anahit, "Mother of Chastity," known also as the "Pure and Spotless Goddess," who was the daughter of Aramazd, and corresponded to the Greek Artemid and the Roman Diana.¹⁰ She was also regarded as the benefactress of the people. Writes Agathangelus: "Through her (Anahit) the Armenian land exists; from her it draws its life, she is the glory of our nation and its protectress."¹¹ Images and shrines were dedicated to her name under the titles, "The Golden Mother," "The Being of Golden Birth." A summer festival was celebrated in her honor at which a dove and a rose were offered to her golden image. The day was called "Vartavar," meaning "the flaming of the rose." The temples of Anahit and the golden image were destroyed with the conversion of the people to Christianity, but the festival has continued as a regular church festival under the same name "Vartavar" though of course with a different meaning.

The second and third daughters of Aramazd were Astghik, the goddess of beauty, and Nane, or Noone, the goddess of contrivance.¹² The former was the wife of Vahakn, the mythical king-god, the legend in respect to whom has been told, and corresponded to the Phoenician and

⁹ "Und auch heute pflegt man stellenweise niederzuknieen und zu beten: 'O du göttliche strahlende Sonne! Dein Fuss ruhe auf meinem Antlitz! Bewahre meine Kinder!'" u. s. w. Abeghian p. 43.

¹⁰ Although the Greeks have identified Anahit with their goddess of chastity, Artemid, the Armenian goddess is not of Greek, but of Assyro-Babylonian origin according to Emin. Her name "Anahato" in ancient Persian means "Spotless." Agathangelus p. 126; Emin p. 10.

¹¹ Agathangelus. Langlois 1:127.

¹² Raffi p. 129.

Both Nane and Astghik are mentioned by Agathangelus who speaks of the latter as the Aphrodite of the Greeks. (Agathangelus p. 173.) Emin likens Nane to Venus. The fact is that very little is known of either. (Agathangelus p. 168; Emin p. 16.)

Sidonian Astarte. It is stated by Raffi that the goddess of contrivance was a necessary power to womankind, for then as now woman had to make big things out of small. Sandaramet, the wife of Aramazd, was an invisible goddess and personification of the earth. Her master sent rain upon her, and brought forth vegetation. Later she became the synonym for Hades. Perhaps the best summary of Armenian worship as existing before the Christian time is that given by St. Martin.

La religion Arménienne était probablement un mélange des opinions de Zoroastre, fort alterés par le cult des divinités grecques. On voyait dans les temples de l'Arménie un grand nombre de statues de divinités, auxquelles on faisait des sacrifices d'animaux, ce qui ne se pratiquait point dans la religion de Zoroastre, qui, à proprement parler, n'admettait pas l'existence d'autre divinité que le temps sans bornes, appelé Zerwan.¹³ Les plus puissants des dieux étaient Aramazd (Ormuzd), Anahid (Venus), Mihir (Mihr), ou Mithra. On y adorait encore d'autres divinités inférieures.

Anahit, however, was goddess of chastity, and did not therefore correspond to Venus.¹⁴

SECTION 2. LEGENDS OF ABGAR, THADDEUS, AND ST. BARTHOLOMEW

The first connection that Armenians had with Christianity occurred in the reign of King Abgar, whose capital was at Edessa (now Ourfa) during the time of Christ's teaching in Palestine.¹⁵ The story is legendary and very popular. Abgar was called a great man because of his exceeding meekness and wisdom. As the result of several severe military campaigns, the health of the king began to give way. This led to complications which developed into a very painful disease. It was at this time that Abgar sent two of his messengers to the Roman governor, Marinus, to show the Roman a treaty of peace that had been made between Ardasches and his brother of Persia, who had quarreled and had been reconciled by their kinsman Abgar; for the Romans suspected that Abgar had gone to Persia in order to collect and direct a Persian-Armenian army against the Romans.¹⁶ To clear himself of all suspicion, therefore, those two messengers were sent to show the treaty of peace to the Roman governor. On their return the messengers went up to Jerusalem in order to see Christ, having heard of his wonderful deeds. And when they returned to their king, Abgar, they told of the works of Christ, at which the king marveled, and believed him to be the very Son of God. The king, because of his sickness, sent Christ

¹³ St. Martin 1:305, 306.

¹⁴ In the reigns of Artasches I and Tigranes II, many Greek statues were imported from abroad, and the latter king not only constructed temples for the worship of Greek divinities, but also ordered all to offer sacrifices and to worship newly acquired gods and goddesses. (Moses of Khorene pp. 86-88.)

¹⁵ St. Martin 1:295.

¹⁶ Moses of Khorene p. 95.

a letter asking him to come and heal him of his disease. The letter is quoted as follows:

The letter of Abgarus to our Saviour Jesus Christ. "Abgarus, a prince of the world, unto Jesus the Saviour and Benefactor, who hast appeared in the City of Jerusalem, Greetings.

"I have heard of thee, and of the healings wrought by thy hands, without drugs and without roots; for it is said that thou givest sight to the blind, thou makest the lame to walk, and thou cleanest the lepers; thou curest those who have been long tormented by diseases, and raisest even the dead. And when I heard all this concerning thee, I thought that either thou art God come down from heaven that workest these things, or the Son of God. I have written unto thee, that thou shouldst trouble thyself to come unto me, and heal me of my disease. I have heard also that the Jews murmur against thee, and think to torture thee. My city is a small one, but it is beautiful, and it is sufficient for us twain."¹⁷

The messengers delivered the message to Jesus in Jerusalem, to which the gospel bears witness in the words, "There were some amongst the heathen that came up to him." But Jesus could do no more than to send a letter in reply.

The answer to the letter of Abgarus, written at the command of our Saviour by the Apostle Thomas: "Blessed is he who believeth on me, though he hath not seen me. For it is written concerning me thus: 'they that have seen me believed not on me, but they that have not seen me shall believe and live.' And concerning that which thou hast written unto me to come down unto thee, it is needful that I fulfill all that for which I was sent; and when I have fulfilled it I will ascend unto Him that sent me. And after my ascension I will send one of my disciples, who shall heal thee of thy disease, and give life unto thee and unto all that are with thee."¹⁸

This letter was duly delivered to Abgar, with the image of the Saviour, which was still kept in Edessa at the time of Moses' writing. The legend concerning the image is somewhat as follows. One of the three messengers sent to Jesus with the letter of Abgar was an artist who was told to paint a portrait of Jesus in case the latter found it impossible to take the journey. The artist tried in vain to paint a good picture, and having noticed him, Jesus took a handkerchief and passing it over his face a most exact likeness was stamped upon it, which he gave to the artist to be given to the king.

The quaint ending of Abgar's letter is worth the whole legend. What could be simpler or more seductive than the invitation, "My city is a small one, but it is beautiful, and it is sufficient for us twain."

The tradition of the Armenian church, or the Gregorian church, as it is more commonly called, acknowledges St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew as the original founders, who are therefore designated as the first illuminators of Armenia.¹⁹ Concerning the recognition of the tradition

¹⁷ Moses of Khorene p. 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ormanian p. 3.

of St. Bartholomew, which includes his apostolic journeys, his preaching, and his martyrdom in Armenia, all Christian churches are unanimous. The name Albanus given as the place of his martyrdom, is the same as the name Albacus, hallowed by the Armenian tradition. His mission covered a period of sixteen years (A.D. 44-60). There is difference of opinion, however, in regard to the dates.

The traditions about St. Thaddeus vary. Some suppose him to have been the brother of St. Thomas, and according to these, he traveled to Ardaze by way of Edessa. There is an anachronism, however, in this tradition which would transfer the mission of Thaddeus to the second century. According to a second tradition he is not the brother of Thomas, but one St. Judas Thaddeus, surnamed Lebbeus, who also is said to have established a sanctuary of worship at Ardaze, a circumstance admitted by the Greek and Latin churches. The Armenian church places the time of this mission as a period of eight years from 35-43. That this has been done to lay a strong foundation for the claim of apostolic origin may be suspected, especially in view of the belief that apostolic origin is essential to every Christian church, in order, as stated by Ormanian, "to place her in union with her Divine Founder." The church, however, has us at its mercy, for conclusive evidence one way or another is lacking. Nevertheless, the fact of Thaddeus' mission to Armenia wherever and whenever it might have occurred, is undisputed.²⁰

The matter is not especially important except to theologians with their doctrines of "apostolic origins." What is perfectly clear is that both these men did their work in comparative silence, and that they did not make very much headway, for if they had there would have been less doubt concerning the traditions. The great work was done by King Tiridates, and Gregory, who converted him about A.D. 301. The traditions concerning these men are among the most cherished possessions of the Armenian church.

SECTION 3. LEGENDS OF RHIPSIME AND GREGORY

These traditions have their historical setting in the reign of Tiridates, and of Chosroes the father of Tiridates.²¹ Just as there was an Arsacid dynasty in Armenia, dating and originating in the Parthian conquests and supremacy, so also was there an Arsacid dynasty of Persia. The Persian king at the time of Chosroes was a kinsman of the latter, called

²⁰ There is another legend of St. Thaddeus, according to which he converted Abgar and his whole court to Christianity, curing the king of his disease at the same time. (Moses p. 97.) Abgar, who died shortly afterward, divided his kingdom between his son and nephew. The former at once resumed the pagan worship while the latter was forced to apostatize. But the preaching and martyrdom of St. Thaddeus at the hand of Sanatruk, the nephew, is recorded by Faustus of Byzantium, one of the most reliable of early Armenian historians. (Faustus of Byzantium. Langlois 1:210. See also Lynch, *Armenia* 1:278, and Moses of Khorene pp. 98-99.)

²¹ Lynch 1:286.

Ardavan, who was overthrown (A.D.227) by a Persian prince of the province of Fars, named Ardashir.²² His dynasty, a very powerful one, known as the Sassanid dynasty, supplanted the Arsacid dynasty of Persia. Chosroes of Armenia, fearing future difficulty with the new Persian monarch, ardently supported his dethroned kinsman. The next year (228), therefore, he led a huge army beyond the frontiers of Persia, and laid waste her provinces to the gates of Ctesiphon.²³ The war was continued for ten years, during which time the Armenian capital, Vagharshapat, was filled with the booty of successful raids. The reigning Caesar, Severus, also alarmed by the success of the new Persian king, headed a Roman army against Ardashir. Realizing the jeopardy of his position, the Persian resolved to put Chosroes out of the way by whatever means possible. A Parthian of the royal blood, Anak by name, consented to execute his king's desire, and went with his family to Vagharshapat as a refugee. A friendship sprang up between himself and his future victim, enabling him to execute his purpose, which he did in company with his brother while preparation was being made for a spring campaign. But the murderers were cut off in their escape by Armenian horsemen and precipitated into the Araxes, while the dying king gave orders to massacre the family of Anak. Only two of the children were rescued, one of whom was Gregory, the Illuminator, founder of the Armenian national church, called also the Gregorian church. The child Gregory was taken to Cesarea where he was educated in the tenets of Christianity.²⁴

Ardashir died shortly after the murder of his foe, and thus failed to follow up his advantage except for a few raids into Armenian territory. Tiridates, a child at this time, was the oldest son of Chosroes, and as heir to the Armenian throne was the chief obstacle in the way of the ambitions of his uncles, whose treatment of the young king compelled him to take refuge in Rome where he was educated.²⁵ Having distinguished himself by personal bravery in a Gothic campaign, his nation's dominions were restored to him by the support of a Roman army, for during his absence Armenia was invaded by Shapur, the successor of Ardashir. The Persian king had taken advantage of the disputes of Tiridates' uncles. The remainder of the story is legendary.

Gregory had been informed in the meantime of his father's deed, and seeking to make such amends for it as he could, he journeyed to Rome, where he attached himself as a servant to the exiled king, Tiridates. The latter, after his victory over the Persians and his re-accession to the

²² St. Martin pp. 302, 303.

²³ Agathangelus. Langlois 1:115.

²⁴ St. Martin p. 303.

Agathangelus p. 122.

²⁵ St. Martin p. 304. Agathangelus p. 121.

Armenian throne, entered the temple of Anahit in company with his faithful servant Gregory, to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving. A feast followed the ceremony, at which many guests were present, and Tiridates, who must have known of Gregory's attachment to Christianity, commanded the latter to make an offering of garlands to the great goddess. Gregory refused. The king was angry. "How dare you," exclaimed the king, "adore a god whom I do not adore?" Persuasion and finally torture were used to coerce the pious and firm-minded youth, but to no avail. In the meantime, Tiridates had been informed as to Gregory's identity, i.e., that he was the son of his father's murderer, whereupon the king commanded that Gregory be cast into a deep pit where he was left to perish.²⁶

For thirteen years Gregory languished in his well, and was only saved from death by the ministrations of a widow who resided in the castle of Artaxata just by the pit. This was done in great secret, for Tiridates had issued an edict which admonished his subjects to beware of the resentment of the gods, of Aramazd, Anahit, and Vahakn, and following the practice of the Romans, to lay hands on all offenders against the gods, chief of whom, evidently, were the Christians. They were to be bound hand and foot, brought before the gate of the palace, and if found guilty their lands and chattels were assigned to their accusers.²⁷

While Christians were being robbed, and Gregory was slowly perishing of misery in his prison well, there arrived at Vagharshapat a Roman virgin of exquisite beauty, named Rhipsime, in company with her nurse Gaiane, and thirty-three followers who were also virgins. They had fled from the Emperor Diocletian, who had selected Rhipsime for his spouse, after a most careful search of his kingdom for the most beautiful of women.²⁸ Rhipsime, unfortunately had taken a vow of chastity, and there was nothing to do but to flee. Meanwhile an ambassador from Rome arrived at the court of the Armenian king bearing a letter in which Tiridates was informed of the flight of the virgin to his land, and bidden to discover the refugees, to send Rhipsime to Rome, and to kill her companions. The emperor added, however, in truly generous fashion, that he might himself marry her if he was overcome by her charms.

The band was found, Rhipsime was recognized, and the king sent an escort of litters to bring them to his court. As Diocletian suspected, the Armenian king also fell in love, for the maiden, having refused the pomp of a royal equipage, was forced to appear before him in court. The Armenian's suit was likewise a failure. Rhipsime would marry, provided he became Christian, which the king took as mockery. Again the girl

²⁶ Agathangelus pp. 126-33.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 135.

²⁸ Lynch 1:256. Agathangelus p. 139.

succeeded in escaping, but she was tracked, overtaken with her companions, bound with cords, and put to death with great cruelty. Both Rhipsime and her nurse Gaiane are commemorated on the calendar of saints, and at Etchmiadzin, the religious center of the nation, there are three edifices; the largest and most important bears the name of St. Gregory, while the other two respectively bear the names of the two saints, Rhipsime and Gaiane.

Agathangelus relates the legend in his *Histoire du Règne de Tiridate* but unfortunately the book has been tampered with and now contains much questionable material.²⁹ There are mentioned ominous thunderclaps, openings of heaven, divine voices exhorting Rhipsime to stand firm in her faith, and the transformation of Tiridates into a grass-eating boar which was the punishment for his great crime. The sister of the king, Khosrovitukht, had a vision, in which she was told that the only remedy was to send for a prisoner named Gregory, who had been cast into a well some thirteen years before. A rope was let down into the cavern, and to the astonishment of all, there emerged a human form, blackened to the color of coal. It was none other than Gregory. He also saw visions and heard divine voices speak through curious openings in heaven. Strange columns of fire and flaming crosses of light appeared to him in the places where Rhipsime and Gaiane suffered martyrdom; and there appeared a great deal more to him which is recorded, even as there must have appeared yet more which is not recorded. The result of all of this was that Gregory ordered the construction of two chapels, one to be erected in honor of Rhipsime, the other in memory of Gaiane, both of which are still standing in Etchmiadzin. Etchmiadzin means, "the place where the Only-Begotten descended" for it was at this place that Gregory beheld his miraculous vision. Having prayed for the healing of the king, the horns fell from the royal head, and Tiridates, now a Christian, shared in the work of constructing the chapels.³⁰ He ascended Ararat and returned with huge blocks of stone which he laid at the portals of the chapels in expiation of his sin. It was customary among Armenians to place

²⁹ Critics have distinguished Agathangelus, the historian, from Pseudo Agathangelus, the meddler, who evidently had religious interests at stake. The former lived in the fourth century, and was secretary to Tiridates, who unquestionably commissioned him to keep the records of the events of his reign. He is spoken of by Moses and other ancient historians as sincere and reliable. It is thus assumed that the original work has been destroyed or lost, and that the Greek and Armenian texts now existing are the work of an interpolator who desired to weave the straggling skeins of religious sentiment into a single garment by establishing an historic and literary sanction to the religious events of the period of the conversion. There are many indications of this, chief of which is the highly imaginative style of narrative, undoubtedly designed with the particular intent of capturing the minds of the people. (Langlois' introduction to Agathangelus 1:99-108.)

³⁰ Langlois in his footnotes states that the chapel consecrated to St. Gaiane was constructed by the Katholikos Ezdras in the year 630, and repaired in 1652. The church of St. Rhipsime was built by the Katholikos Comidas in 618, and repaired in 1653. The main cathedral was built by St. Gregory. They are situated in Etchmiadzin. (Dubois 3:213. Langlois 1:160, 162.)

huge blocks of stone at the entrance of a church by way of offering. Dubois de Montpèrey saw a number of such stones, six or seven feet high, in front of the cathedral at Etchmiadzin, but Lynch found no trace of them.³¹

Such are the legends of Gregory and of Tiridates' conversion to Christianity. In all justice, the highly imaginative material which was probably the work of an enthusiast, and in all certainty a surreptitious insertion in the work of the historian, should be distinguished from the less fanciful material concerning the imprisonment of Gregory and the martyrdom of the virgins, which though legendary, may probably be connected with the events of history.

Although Dubois de Montpèrey recognizes that all traditions point to the conversion of Armenia as having taken place before the conversion of Constantine (in 312), he does not consider this as probable, for Tiridates, as a tributary king, and imitator of the Romans in all things, could not have had the courage to take so important a step except in following out the policy of the emperor.³² Gregory, according to the view of Dubois, remained in his prison well until Constantine accepted Christianity, when the Armenian king called for him and was converted as a matter of diplomacy after listening to his exhortations.

But this is not accepted by modern writers, any more than it was by the ancient historians. Bryce places the conversion at 302, and states that the so-called conversion of Constantine happened either twelve or thirty-seven years later, according as one reckons to the battle of the Milvian Bridge, or his baptism.³³ Armenia, therefore, was the first country that adopted Christianity as a religion of state, a matter of no small pride to the Gregorians, and it has been maintained as the national religion ever since in a form so intact as to surpass the dreams of the most ultra-conservative. And this, too, in the face of attacks by Persian fire-worshippers who attempted to force their religion upon the people, Greek and Latin popes, Mohammedan khalifs, and Turkish sultans. Ormanian, former Armenian patriarch at Constantinople, who gives the date as 301, considers the existence of the churches of St. Rhipsime and St. Gaiane with their inscriptions as positive proof, and mentions also the testimony in the writings of Eusebius, who cites the war of the year 311 which the Emperor Maximianus, the Dacian, declared against Armenians on account of their, at that time, recent conversion.³⁴ The critical studies made since the journey of Dubois (1837) are conclusive at least in this, that the conversion of Tiridates and of the nation could not have taken place later

³¹ Lynch 1:291, note.

³² Dubois 3:276.

³³ Bryce pp. 314, 315.

³⁴ Ormanian p. 13.

than the year 302, and there is no doubt therefore of the claim that the Gregorian church is the oldest national Christian church of the world.

SECTION 4. THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AS A SOCIAL FORCE

The conversion of the people followed close upon the conversion of the king, for Gregory was a temple-building priest not without ambition, and the king was an acknowledged hero. The business of converting the nation was not a matter of priests and preaching as suggested by Dubois,³⁵ as indicated before, it was rather a matter of fire and sword. Ormanian supposes that it was due to the work of the Christian communities already established, whose work was stimulated and encouraged by the king's conversion.³⁶ "Indeed," he says, "the almost instant conversion of the whole of Armenia at the beginning of the fourth century, can not be explained but by the preexistence of a Christian element which had taken root in the country." And again, "The first nucleus of the faithful, by its steadfast energy, at length succeeded in gaining the mastery over both obstacles and persecutions." This does not seem to me to be correct, for in the first place the Christianity of the first, second, and third centuries was not the Christianity of Gregory; it was one of the many forms of worship killed by Gregory; and in the second place there are sufficient records to prove the wholesale destruction of pagan temples, images, idols, and inscriptions as carried out by the king and saint, and of the use of the sword in forcing the people to change their faith.³⁷

First, then, what was the Christianity of the first centuries? It is clear that the ideal was one of communal simplicity of life. That it was opposed to all hierarchies and established priesthoods there can be no question. The irksome round of daily toil was idealized in the fellowship of a common faith, the central point of which was the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Hence baptism was the all-important event, for through baptism the Holy Spirit descended into the human heart even as into Christ when he was baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus was no God come to earth in human form by a miraculous conception; he was the son of Joseph and Mary. Feeling his kinship with God he was baptized, which ceremony was merely symbolic of the Indwelling Spirit. These early Christians have been called adoptionists, for the ceremony of baptism is said to represent the adoption of the individual by God, or by the Holy Spirit, both expressions having been used synonymously. Simple and pure, it seems that the adoptionists came as near carrying out the

³⁵ Dubois 3:276.

³⁶ Ormanian p. 8.

³⁷ Agathangelus pp. 164-66.

spirit of the teachings of Jesus as any Christian sect that ever existed.³⁸ But how utterly opposed, how perfectly contradictory to the brick and mortar religion of Gregory! That the adoptionists were objects of persecution by the orthodox church is a certainty, and it was very probably this sect that was referred to in "that stubborn heresy of their native land" mentioned so frequently by Armenian writers. The following picture was clearly set forth in a disputation between two Armenian churchmen occurring at the close of the third century. "Tell me," says Archelaus, "over whom it was that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove? Who is this one whom John baptized? If he was already perfect, if he was already the Son, if he was already Virtue, the Holy Spirit could not have entered into him. A kingdom can not enter into a kingdom."³⁹ What is also to the point is the celebrated formula of Nice (325) at which the nature of Christ was defined as essentially and continuously divine. "Christ a very God, begotten of God, but not a creature of God; Son of God, of one nature with God; who came down from heaven and took flesh, and became man, and suffered and ascended unto heaven; who was before he was begotten, and who has always been." The decision was in absolute contradiction to the adoptionist faith, and it was legislated by this august council, that the members of such faith, who were called Paulicians, after their leader Paul of Samosata, should be rebaptized before admission to the church.⁴⁰ The recalcitrants were driven to the mountains, where they increased in number as in strength until the persecution of the ninth century. Both Agathangelus and Faustus of Byzantium were silent concerning these people, and, one suspects, advisedly so.

Such was pre-Gregorian Christianity. How ridiculous to suppose that the conversion of the nation was due to the firm roots already established by the Christians when the Christians themselves had to be converted!

On the contrary, it was the right of might that established the new religion. The troops of the capital city were led by the king and priest in such an image- and temple-smashing campaign as was never before seen. Proceeding down the Araxes valley, the temple of the god Dir was levelled to the ground; the temple of Anahit was stoutly defended but to no avail; the temple was burned. One after another of the most famous sanctuaries were destroyed; temples of Aramazd, of Mithra, of

³⁸ See Conybeare's translation and annotation of the *Key of Truth*, the book of the Paulicians (Adoptionists) of Thonrak. This book contains the baptismal and ordinal service of the Adoptionist church. (Especially pp. vi-xcii.)

³⁹ Conybeare p. xcvi. The original is given by Conybeare as follows: "Dic mihi," says Archelaus, "super quem Spiritus Sanctus sicut columba descendit. Quis est etiam qui baptizatur a Ioanne si perfectus erat, si Filius erat, si virtus erat, non poterat Spiritus ingredi; sicut nec regnum potest ingredi intra regnum."

Lynch 1:279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1:282.

Nane, and of Anahit, many of which were defended by the vanquished until overpowered.⁴¹ Shrines of Vahakn and of Astghik were laid to waste to be replaced by Christian churches which grew up over the ruins as if overnight; and if a temple was destroyed, it was only to build a Christian church in its stead. So construction followed in the wake of destruction, the old was supplanted by the new, and when all armed resistance was beaten down, the king and priest continued the work by preaching.

When the work was fairly under way the ambitious priest journeyed to Cesarea in Cappadocia where he got himself ordained. This Gregory was no meek-spirited adoptionist. He was the son of Anak, of royal blood, ambitious, zealous, suffering and doing all things to gain his ends.

In view, therefore, of the actual character of preexisting Christianity, and of the methods employed in converting the people, how can one reasonably suppose that the "instant conversion of the whole of Armenia to Christianity can not be explained but by the preexistence of a Christian element which had taken root in the country"?

The state-authorized religion, however, did take root in the country, and became inextricably interwoven with the self-consciousness of the nation. It became the organ of national expression, and for many centuries has been the very backbone of the people. If the molten metals of national life had hardened during the reign of the Arsacidae kings they were at the time of the conversion in a molten state, ready to be remolded. This did not require much time. Old festivals were carried over intact, except that they were given a new meaning. The old national traditions, legends, and folk-lore were in the common possession of the people, and there was no reason for discouraging them. In fact the Armenian church even more than the state encouraged them, for it recognized in them a source of solidarity and national unity, as essential to the life of the church as its hierarchies, liturgy, and calendar of saints. So much then was old; part of the past carried over into the present to be carried over into the future. What then was new? First the legends and traditions, already mentioned, imbedded in the immediately past events of the new order. Legends of Abgar, of Gregory, of Thaddeus, of Rhipsime, of Tiridates, passed like magic fire from person to person, creating a common sentiment which made the foundations of the new church absolutely secure. How firmly this foundation was established is indicated by the reaction of the church to the decisions at the Council of Chalcedon, where the dogma of the dual nature of Christ was affirmed, in perfect contradiction to the Nicæan dogma, and by the reaction against the Persian proposals to accept fire-worship as the state religion.

⁴¹ Lynch 1:294.

Agathangelus pp. 164-66.

I shall consider the second point first. As already stated, the year 428 marked the end of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty. The nation was divided between Persia and Rome at this time, largely as a result of internal dissensions. In the year 450 the Persian king sent a letter to the Armenian princes, setting forth the excellence of fire-worship and the foolishness of Christianity, and summoned the Armenians to accept the Persian religion.⁴² A council of bishops and laymen was held and a reply of unanimous refusal was drawn up. "From this faith no one can move us, neither angels nor men, neither sword nor fire, nor water, nor any deadly punishment."⁴³ A rather impudent reply from a subject nation to one which dominated it; but thoroughly characteristic of the Armenians. The Persians did use fire and sword, and defeated the Armenians in the plain of Avarair under Mount Ararat (451). But they did not gain their end. An old historian wrote of the battle, "swords of slayers grew dull, but their necks were not weary," and the Persian high priest having seen the utter hopelessness of his project wrote, "these people have put on Christianity, not like a garment, but like flesh and blood."⁴⁴

Already, only one hundred fifty years after the conversion, the foundation of the church was secure. This of course was made possible by the completeness of the work of its founders; but this in itself would not have been sufficient. A common favorable sentiment had been created, which grew up under the natural conditions of life, and inasmuch as the legends described are part of the common beliefs of the people, it may be inferred that they played an important rôle in the formation of this sentiment. The church, on the other hand, has incorporated these legendary beliefs in its ritual and ceremony, and in that way has given them the necessary sanction by which they are passed on from generation to generation. They thus form part of the permanent social tradition of the Armenian people.

The security of the church at this early time (450) was indicated not only by the reaction of the nation to the Persian proposals of fire-worship, but also by the reaction to the decision of the Council of Chalcedon, at which, as stated, the dual nature of Christ was dogmatically affirmed, in contradiction to the dogma established at the Council of Nicæa (325),

⁴² St. Martin 1:appendix.

Elisée Vartabed, *Histoire de Vartan*. Langlois 2:190-91.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 195.

⁴⁴ Liddett. *An Ancient People*.

The detailed events of this struggle against the Persians are told in the *Histoire de Vartan et de la Guerre des Arméniens*, by Elisée Vartabed who belonged to the second order of translators and served under General Vartan during the war, the history of which he narrates. After the sad ending of the series of dramatic incidents that made up this struggle for religious freedom, Elisée sought solitude and lived on herbs and roots in a mountainside cave which came to be known as the 'cave of Elisée.' Because of a growing social intimacy he was obliged to find a second cave in a more remote section of the country, where he completed his work and died. His history is written in the style of a religious mystic, is full of dramatic imagery, and has come down as an Armenian classic. (Langlois 2:179-82.)

accepted by the Armenian church. But at the time of the Chalcedonian council, the Persian difficulties were taking place, the battle of Avarair having occurred during the same year, and it was not until 491 that the Armenians held a synod of their own which assembled at Vagharshapat, in order to take decisive action.⁴⁵ The decisions of the Council of Chalcedon were rejected and the action was repeated at subsequent synods. Of the three sees or patriarchates, the Roman at Rome, the Greek at Alexandria, and the Byzantine at Constantinople, the latter was gaining in power, and it was at the Council of Chalcedon that the precedence of the see of Constantinople was recognized. Naturally, neither the Roman nor Greek sees acknowledged the decision of the council, but later both Greek and Latin churches revoked their opposition, and recognized it as the fourth Ecumenic Council. But the Armenian church would have nothing to do with Chalcedon, in spite of Greek and Latin approval, and since that time she has stood alone, absolutely independent of Greek and Latin churches. Ormanian states: "She set herself to resist every new dogmatic utterance said to emanate from revelation, as well as any innovation which could in any way pervert the primitive faith."⁴⁶ The "primitive faith" may be a slight stretch of point, but the fact that the Armenian church adopted an absolutely independent policy, which separated her from all other Christian churches, and to which she has steadfastly adhered in spite of persistent Greek and Latin influence and efforts at domination, is in clear support of my assertion that the social foundations of the church were firmly and securely established as early as 450, only one hundred fifty years after the work of Gregory and Tiridates.

⁴⁵ Lynch 1:313.

Ormanian p. 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 36.

CHAPTER IV

LOCALITY LEGENDS

SECTION 1. ARARAT

There is a third and last body of Armenian legends more closely related to the second group discussed than to the first, and yet marked off in some respects from the second as well. They have a distinct religious stamp like those we have just finished describing, and they are all related in some way to the stories of the Old Testament. The legend of Haic is related to the Old Testament, for Haic was the great-grandson of Noah, but it clearly belongs to the first group taken up, for the reason that it has to do with the origin of the Armenian nation. The first body, including Haic, and the legends of Semiramis and Ara, Vahakn, Artasches and Satenik, and Artavazd, are all concerned with ancient Armenian kings, real or mythical, and all go back to a time before the introduction of Christianity. Vahakn was deified, but that does not exclude him since he was first a king. The second group, including the legends of Abgar, Rhipsime and Gaiane, Gregory, Thaddeus, and Tiridates, are all concerned with historical figures, real or supposed, and there is no doubt about their historic reality, with the exception of Rhipsime and Gaiane. But what marks them off from the other groups is that they are all concerned with the introduction of Christianity into the country. Those of the third group have no historic value whatever. They are legends based upon legends that date back to a period even more remote than the legend of Haic, and their social value does not approach that of the first two groups. They are all connected in some way, either with the Old Testament legend of Noah, or with the legend of the origin of man. No traveler ever passed through Armenia without hearing of one or more of them.

"In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat."¹ Every Armenian, and others, too, believe that this is the Ararat of Armenia, or Masis as it is called, and it is true that there is absolutely nothing to disprove such a belief. James Bryce has given a careful consideration to the question, and states in conclusion that full liberty is left to the traveler to consider the "snowy sovereign of the Araxes plain" to be the true Ararat.² There are several points that may be noted. First, there is nothing in the statement of Genesis to show that the Ararat mentioned was a mountain called by that

¹ Genesis 8:4.

² James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat* p. 210.
St. Martin 1:264.

name; it seems rather that Ararat was a section of country, for the passage states that the ark rested "upon the mountains of Ararat." In the second place, the mountain is not called Ararat by Armenians, but Masis. And thirdly, there is no independent Armenian tradition of the flood so far as is known, for it can not be shown that the modern tradition is older than the Christian era. .

These facts would be conclusive evidence that Armenian Ararat is not the traditional Ararat of the Old Testament, were it not, first, for the fact that there was in the region of the mountain a province of Airarat which in all probability corresponds to the biblical Ararat. Secondly, the biblical Ararat unquestionably corresponds to the Assyrian Urarthu which is the section of country about Lake Van and Mount Ararat. So that, although not absolutely conclusive, the Armenian tradition enjoys a very high degree of probability.

In this connection the legend of the village of Nakhitchevan is worth noting. It is situated just to the north of the mountain on the left bank of the Araxes. Armenians believe it to be the place where Noah first landed, and as proof, the name of the village, which means, "the first place of landing," is cited. One might suppose the name to have been given by the Christians after the conversion to Christianity, were it not that Ptolemy places in the same spot a city named Naxuana which is the exact Greek for the Armenian name. Also Josephus, fifty years before Ptolemy speaks of the place, as quoted by St. Martin; "Les Arméniens appellent ce lieu l'endroit de la descente parce que c'est là que l'arche trouva un endroit de salut, et qu'encore actuellement les indigènes montrent ses débris."³ Tavernier who traveled through the country along about 1700 speaks of Nakhitchevan as the "oldest city of the world" and gives the tradition.⁴ But many Jews, who undoubtedly gave the village its name, lived in Armenia, long before the Christian era.

Situated on a broad plain four or five thousand feet above sea level, Ararat rises majestic and solitary to a height of 17,000 feet. There are no lesser peaks or ranges to destroy the grandeur of the effect. Except for its companion, Little Ararat, which rises beside it on a common base to a height of 12,840 feet, it stands alone as monarch of the broad plain it surveys. Little Ararat is in the form of a perfect cone, whereas Ararat is broad-shouldered and dome-shaped, supported by huge buttresses and capped with snow a considerable distance down the slope through the entire year. It is truly symbolic of strength and majesty.

Such is the mountain about which a thousand legends cluster. Marco Polo says of the mountain: "There is an exceeding great mountain on which

³ St. Martin 1:267-68.

⁴ Tavernier, *Voyages* 1:43.

it is said the ark of Noah rested, and for this cause it is called the mountain of the Ark of Noah." In 1254, a little before Marco Polo's time, a Franciscan friar, William of Rubruck passed by the mountain upon which the ark is said to have rested, which mountain, he said, could not be ascended, though the earnest prayers of a pious monk prevailed so far that a piece of the wood of the ark was brought to him by an angel, which piece, he said, is still preserved in a church near by as a holy relic. He gives Masis as the name of the mountain and adds that it is the Mother of the World. According to a Persian tradition it is called "Cradle of the Human Race." Still more interesting is the account by Sir John Maundeville, part of which runs as follows: "Fro Artyroun go men to an Hille, that is clept Sabisocolle. And there besyde is another Hille, that men clepen Ararathe: but the Jews clepen it Taneez, where Noas Schipp rested: and zit is upon that Montayne and men may see it a ferr in clear wedre: and that Montayne is well a myle high. And sum men seyn that they have seen and touched the Schipp; and put here Fyngres in the parties where the Feend went out when that Noe seyd 'Benedicta.' But they that seyn such Wordes seyn here Willie, for a man may not gon up the Montayne for gret plenties of Snow that is alle weys on that Montayne nouther Somer ne Winter: so that no man may gon up there: ne never man did, sithe the time of Noe: Saf a Monk that be the grace of God brought one of the Plankes down, that zit is in the Mynstre at the foot of the Montayne. And beside is the Cytes of Dayne that Noe founded. And faste by it is the Cytee of Any, in which were 1000 churches. But upon that Montayne to gon up this monk had gret desir: and so upon a day he went up and when he was the third part of the Montayne he was so wery that he mighthe not furthere, and so he rested him and felle to slep, and when he awoke he fonde himself liggyie at the foot of the Montayne. And then he preyde devoutly to God that he wold vouch saf to suffre him gon up. And an angelle cam to him and seyde that he scholde gon up: and so he did. And sithe that Time never non. Wherefore men scholde not beleeve such Woordes."⁵

The legend of the monk is usually given in a form which confirms still more the sacredness of the mountain. St. Jacob, as the monk was named, tried three successive times to climb the mountain. Each time he fell asleep intending to resume his journey the next morning, only to wake up finding himself at the same point he had started from the preceding day. An angel came to him after the third time, and told him that God had forbidden mortal foot ever to tread on the sacred summit, but that he should be given a fragment of the ark in which mankind had been preserved as a reward for his devout perseverance.⁶ This treasure is still

⁵ Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat*, chapter on Ararat.

⁶ Dubois 3:465.

preserved at Etchmiadzin and the saint is commemorated by the little monastery of St. Jacob, which till 1840, when a tremendous shaking of the mountain showered the little monastery with rocks of destruction, stood above the valley of Arghuri on the slopes of Ararat. .

The little village of Arghuri, the single village on the mountainside, was the city of Noah's vineyard, and contained a little church which is said to hallow the spot where Noah first set up an altar.⁷ But this village too, was completely destroyed by the avalanche of 1840. Not the slightest trace of it remains, though only three years before its destruction, Dubois de Montpèreux visited the little city and described it together with the church of Noah, Noah's vineyard, and the monastery of St. Jacob.⁸ In the garden of the city were planted pear trees, apple, plum, cherry, apricot, peach, and nut trees. This very garden was the site of the first vine on which the old patriarch became drunk, and the inhabitants showed Dubois some bits of creepers to prove it. "Dieu," they said, "pour punir les ceps qui avaient ainsi entraîné le pauvre patriarche dans le péché, les condamna à ne plus porter de raisins." Naïve, yes, but very sweetly so. And the church, the people said, marked the place where Noah offered his first sacrifice after the deluge. Except for the garden of Arghuri, wrote Dubois, this great mountain was absolutely destitute of verdure; an old stunted willow, wound about with snow and ice was the only other exception to this. According to the legend, it marked the spot where a board of Noah's ark had taken root and sprung up into a living tree which the people venerated. One was not permitted to take away even the smallest of its feeble branches.

All of this was blotted out so completely by the shower of falling rocks and boulders that it is hard to imagine the places as ever having existed. The primeval willow, the vineyard, the sacred church, and the little monastery of St. Jacob have left not the slightest trace. The bell of the old church is no more heard; the Christian service is not chanted any longer on the sacred mountain of the Ark.

Of the numerous other legends associated with the mountain I shall mention only two. One of them regards the summit of the mountain as the site of Chaldean star-worship, and asserts that a pillar with a figure of a star stood upon it.⁹ According to the same legend, twelve wise men stood beside the pillar to watch for the star of the East, which three of them followed to Bethlehem. The other is in respect to the spring situated above the spot where stood the monastery. A bird, called by the Armenians tetagush, feeds on the locusts which are such a plague to

⁷ Arghuri means "Il sema la vigne." St. Martin pp. 266, 267.

⁸ Dubois 3:465-68.

⁹ Bryce, chapter on Ararat.

the country, and curiously enough, the bird is attracted by the waters of the spring. When the locusts appear, the people carry their bottles to the spring and filling them with the peculiarly charmed water, take them back to their fields where they are placed on the ground to attract the tetagush. The people of Syria and Palestine were much in need of tetagush and Ararat spring water during the spring and summer of 1915, for the swarms of locusts not only devoured the crops but also the leaves and barks of the trees.

SECTION 2. KHOR-VIRAP AND ERZERUM

On the bank of the Araxes, in the plain of Armenia, and in full view of Ararat are located the monastery of Khor-Virap and the chapel of St. Gregory close beside it. An Armenian inscription is cut in the walls of the portico of the monastery which marks the spot where a monk, Johannes by name, appeared twice after his death saying that he had seen Gregory the Illuminator. The chapel of St. Gregory covers the traditional well into which he was thrown and imprisoned for thirteen years by King Tiridates. Dubois descended into a sort of tunnel, fifteen or sixteen feet below the pavement of the chapel, which is part of an old fortress, and was shown the worn stones of a niche where the saint prayed, as evidence of the thirteen years, quite as though other pilgrims who knelt in the same place could not have assisted somewhat the pious work of the saint.¹⁰ The spot is only a few steps from the famous temple dedicated to the principal god of the Armenians, Aramazd, and it seems clear that the pagan king intended to make a sacrifice to his gods in casting the young fanatic into the well. The temple was called Achelichad, meaning "many sacrifices" because of the many offerings here given up to Aramazd. With the era of Christianity, the name Achelichad gave way to the name Khor Virap, meaning dry well. Gregorius Magistros, already mentioned, brought the body of the saint from Constantinople and placed it in the bottom of the well, where it served to cure sick pilgrims.

There is a tradition that the Armenian city of Erzerum, not far from the source of the Euphrates, marks the vicinity of the Garden of Eden. The Persian king Khosref Purveez is said to have encamped in the neighborhood and to have received a message from the prophet Mohammed during his sojourn, in which he was offered the protection of Islam if he would embrace the faith. But the king spurned the proposal and tossed the letter into the Euphrates. Nature, horrified at the sacrilege, dried up the flowers and fruits of the ancient garden and even parched up the sources of the river itself. And so the last relic of Eden became waste.¹¹

¹⁰ Dubois 3:468.

¹¹ Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco, chapter on Armenian folk-songs.
Fraser's Magazine (n.s.) 13:283-97.

In the same connection, there is a plaintive Armenian elegy, composed in the person of Adam, who, sitting at the gate of paradise, and beholding cherubim and seraphim enter the garden, makes the following defence: he did not eat the forbidden fruit until after he had witnessed its fatal effects upon Eve, when, seeing her despoiled of all her glory, he was touched with pity and tasted the immortal fruit in the hope that the Creator, contemplating both in the same plight might with paternal love take compassion on them. But in vain. "The Lord cursed the serpent and Eve," pathetically cries Adam, "and I was enslaved between them." The elegy closes most touchingly,—"When ye enter Eden, shut not the gate of paradise, but place me standing at the gate. I will look in a moment and then bring me back. Ah! I remember ye, O flowers and sweet smelling fountains. Ah! I remember ye, O birds, sweet singing, And ye, O beasts."¹²

¹² *Fraser's Magazine* (n.s.) 13:283-97.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Because these legends are for the most part based upon older legends, and also because some of them are known only locally, they can not be said to have played so important a rôle in Armenian social life as the first two groups of legends. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that all of the Ararat legends have merely a local value. Ararat is the center of the nation, the grand geographical feature of the country, and many of the beliefs clustered about it are held in common. In fact there is a very old belief which considers the sacred mountain to be the center of the world, and to-day it is the common point of meeting of the boundaries of Russian, Turkish, and Persian Armenia. And this is no accident; it is because of the veneration in which the mountain is held, and consequently, the realization of the importance the mountain gives to any territory in which it may be located. The belief that Ararat is the mountain of the Ark, the legend of Noah's vineyard, and the legend of St. Jacob are very commonly accepted.... The primeval willow, the church of Arghuri, the legend, or perhaps one should say, the superstition of the tetagush, and the legend of the wise men in search of the star of the East, enjoy a more restricted circulation. Furthermore, it is natural to suppose that the legends centered in the destroyed city of Arghuri have not been told as frequently as of old, and are therefore dying out gradually, although they seem still to be very much alive. A legend or tradition that is objectified in an old willow, in a monastery, or in a garden, is likely to die out gradually with the destruction of its object. But some of them will never die out, object or no object, as for example the legend of the devout monk who tried to gain the summit of Ararat in order to see the holy Ark. There is something in his waking up each successive morning only to find himself at the same point he had started from the preceding day, which will keep its hold, whether there be a monastery erected in his name or not. And if the vineyard has been destroyed the people may very soon find another. In fact I should be surprised if in traveling through the mountain region of Ararat, I was not shown the legendary vineyard. This, however, would more likely be true of a legend that had a commercial value to the community because of the frequency of travelers, which could certainly not be said of Ararat legends. The same general valuation may be placed upon the Erzerum legends. A legend of this sort is not believed to be true, unless the legend upon which it is based is commonly believed in, and it is certainly safe to suppose that a majority of the Armenian people accept the Old Testament legends. This is important, for when a legend

is not a matter of implicit belief by a people it has little social value. The elegy of Adam can not be properly said to be a legend at all.

The preceding pages point out certain points of resemblance, and certain points of difference between the two words, legend and tradition, which require to be brought out at this point, first, because of vague and loose current usage, and second, in order to establish my own use of these terms. In the first place they are beliefs, and here lies the secret of their social value. Let them be disbelieved in and they may furnish material for entertaining after-dinner conversation, but they no more have the power of welding a people together into a nation, a caste, or a sect; they no longer have the power of creating a common sentiment among a large number of people or of creating a national consciousness.

And in the second place, both the tradition and the legend are passed on from person to person, and from generation to generation. When a tradition is defined as a belief that is handed down orally from father to son, it is not at all differentiated from the legend which is also a belief, and which may also be passed on orally from generation to generation. Neither does a legend or a tradition change its character when the meaning is represented by symbols cut in rock, inscribed on papyrus, or written on paper. The event of inscription is very often a part of their history.

But when it comes to a question of historic value we mark the parting of the ways. A tradition, used in the sense with which we are concerned here, is always rooted in an indisputable historic fact. Consider the traditions of Islam that are centered about the prophet Mohammed. They may have a thousand variations, may have embodied falsehood after falsehood in the course of their transmission from place to place, and from generation to generation, as most of them unquestionably have, but they are traditions, nevertheless, because they are associated with a character who is an undisputed historic figure. The refusal of St. Gregory to offer garlands to the goddess Anahit, and his imprisonment in the well during a period of thirteen years is a tradition because the belief is associated with a historic character. Compare this with the beliefs concerning Haic, Vahakn, Semiramis and Ara, and the distinction is clear, for these characters are all mythical. Artasches and Artavasd are generally recognized as historical kings, and are so spoken of by Moses. As such the beliefs concerning them should be classed as traditions. However, Moses as a historian has been relegated to a secondary position by Carrière, who gave the work a critical examination. This would make the beliefs concerning Artasches and Satenik and Artavasd purely legendary, unless further research establishes more reliable sources of which we do not know. The first group therefore are legends.

In regard to the second group of beliefs all having to do with the introduction of Christianity, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Gregory, and

Tiridates are unquestionably historic; Rhipsime and Gaiane are mythical; the historic authenticity of Abgar is also questionable. We should therefore speak of the legends of Rhipsime, Gaiane and Abgar, and of the traditions of Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Gregory, and Tiridates.

The Ararat and Erzerum group are of course legends with one or two exceptions. The belief concerning the scorning of the proposal of Mohammed by the Persian king who was encamped on the Euphrates as explaining the barrenness of the Garden of Eden certainly has to do with an historic figure, and perhaps two. But it is a legend, nevertheless, because both the prophet of Arabia and the Persian king are accidental rather than fundamental to the belief. The fundamental basis of belief is the legend of the Garden of Eden. The elegy of Adam in explanation of his sinful conduct is neither legend nor tradition, and the belief concerning the tetagush and the spring of Ararat is a superstition. It results in a distinct type of conduct marking it off from both tradition and legend.

I have stated my conclusions at various places, and it would be pointless repetition to summarize them all. I shall therefore sum up only the important ones. The first is that the legends and traditions of Part One are an important part of a larger body of Armenian legends, traditions, folk-songs, and folk-lore, and that their social value lies in the power they have of creating a national sentiment. This national sentiment is the direct result of a social process accomplished through the medium of the traditions, legends, and folk-songs spoken of. An analysis of the national sentiment of ancient Armenia would lead us to the conclusion that it was made up of at least three elements: first, a sentiment of loyalty to the state; secondly, a sentiment of reverence amounting almost to worship for the past glory of the nation; and thirdly, a sentiment of love for the country.

The last sentiment is an especially real experience to all Armenians. Objectified as it was at first in the vast plains, the broad river valleys, the mountain ranges, or simply in the soil that brought forth its vegetation, it came to be objectified in a spirit of independence and in the ideals of freedom and strength. These two objects of the national sentiment of love, the one material, the other immaterial, are not, however, to be dissociated in the social mind, as I have dissociated them on paper. They are inseparable, the material and the spiritual, and simply do not exist apart from each other. Only the emphasis varies, symbolized in one case by the peasant's kissing his native soil, and in the other by the far-away look toward the summit of some distant mountain. And when this sentiment of love is the most important of those sentiments that go to make up a national sentiment, that is, when it dominates all the others, holding them in subjection, there has come to be a national self. A continuous stream of consciousness envelopes the national self, and inasmuch as it

implies a highly-organized and well-developed national self, national self-consciousness is the larger term. It may be objectified and examined especially at a time of injustice from without, and even at the time of an obvious act of injustice by the state which usually results in civil strife. The latter case is illustrative of how one of the sentiments that make up the national sentiment may be under the domination of another, the sentiment of loyalty to the state being subordinate to the sentiment of love for the country in this case.

That the national self is organic, i.e., that it is functional, a vital, living thing which grows and dies is clearly brought out by the second group of legends considered. This is the second general conclusion. The legends and traditions mentioned in this group are of course again part of a larger body, all of which have to do with the introduction of Christianity into the country. The important point is that from this larger body of beliefs there resulted a new national sentiment, new because something had come to be incorporated within it which was not there before. This something was a sentiment of loyalty to the church, evidenced in the readiness to uphold and protect the church with all its recognized encumbrances of hierarchies and paraphernalia against all foreign intrusion, whether peaceful or military in character. With the destruction of the state, this sentiment of loyalty to the church largely absorbed the sentiment of loyalty to the state. Reverence for the past glory of the nation went on unchanged except in so far as the church intensified it as a means of intensifying the whole national sentiment.

A loosely organized, heterogeneous group of people can not boast of a national sentiment, nor of the united action necessary in times of national crisis, as when a people go to war. This united action is only possible where the diverse sentiments of a more or less heterogeneous people have been woven into a national sentiment of the kind spoken of. This weaving process, as I have shown, is essentially a social process, and the materials by means of which it is carried on are largely such as I have been describing, namely, the legends, traditions, and folk-lore that have somehow grown up among a people.

PART TWO
FESTIVALS

CHAPTER I

THE GREGOR'AN CHURCH

As the materials of Part One are part of a larger mass of legends, traditions, and folk-lore, the social value of which lies in their power of creating a national or group sentiment, so the festivals and ceremonies to be taken up in Part Two are part of a larger mass of festivals, ceremonies, and rites whose social value lies in the fact that they constitute a necessary vehicle of expression for this same national sentiment. The festivals are a necessary counterpart of the legends, as the latter are a necessary counterpart of the former. Activity is one of the most fundamental of nature's laws. The sentiment of love for an individual dies eventually in the absence of some formal mode of active expression. But be the action ever so little a thing, such as the laying of flowers upon the grave of the dead, the visiting of a shrine, or the sight of some hallowed spot of sacred memory, the sentiment is kept alive. To be sure a sentiment may smoulder for a lifetime, even as a national sentiment may slumber for centuries without a mode of expression, and then all of a sudden burst forth into a flame, or awaken into life at a mere suggestion from outside. Bereft of statehood, the sentiment of loyalty for the state has slumbered for centuries within the breast of the Armenian people, but how often, how too sadly often, has it not suddenly awakened into hot, new life only to be pacified into slumber again. But the last glow, the little flicker at the end is all that separates the living embers from the dead ash.

How the Armenian church recognized the truth of this by putting into operation a thousand various modes of action in which the new national sentiment that it created has kept itself alive and fresh, may well serve as an object lesson to many another church. She did not make the mistake of imposing an entirely new body of festivals and ceremonies upon the people; she utilized the past and carried over a number of pagan festivals absolutely intact, which she clothed with a new meaning slowly recognized by the people. These form the first group to be considered. In the course of time she created certain new festivals which constitute the second group. And then she identified herself with all of the ceremonies of common life, such as betrothal, marriage, and funeral ceremonies.

In this way the Armenian church has become absolutely and inseparably identified with the life of the people, and the people in turn have been held together into a nation which has continued to give its artists and artisans to the world.¹ What is Armenia? The national Gregorian church; much as Louis XIV, when asked "What is the state?" replied,

¹ Ormanian p. 224.

Bertrand Bareilles, preface to the French edition of Ormanian p. xviii.

"I am the state." This is unquestionably an exaggerated view, but not as much so as might be supposed, since the social life of the people is so completely bound up with the church. The only betrothal and marriage recognized is that sanctioned by the church. Whenever there is a common danger, as has been the case repeatedly during the past twenty years, the people flock to the church for protection. Such secret revolutionary propaganda as has been carried on has been done largely through the church. The young Armenian who returns from his academic life in Paris, a sceptic if not an unbeliever, and certainly opposed to the dogma and ultra-conservatism of his church, does not alienate himself, for he realizes his utter impotence in any kind of work for his people should he do so. In spite of the division of Armenia into three slices, Turkish, Persian, and Russian, the church has retained its hold, and if the position of the people as subject to Turkey, Persia, and Russia has placed her (the church) at a decided disadvantage in coping with the ever constant influence and propaganda, schools, and missionaries of the Greek, Latin, and Protestant churches, she has not at all given in, for the number of Catholic Armenians amounts to only 3 per cent of the number of orthodox Armenians, while the number of Protestant Armenians is only 1 per cent.² Considering, as I say, the utter helplessness of the church in combating outside influences, these figures indicate how closely the life of the people is identified with her. Perhaps her very helplessness has been a source of strength.

These facts together with such little practices as I have mentioned (and I might also note the custom of the Armenian peasant of crossing himself daily at the altar of his community church before beginning his day of toil)³ are sufficient to show that the church has been the chief means of keeping alive the currents of national life, that it is a national church, and that it has identified itself with the common life of the people. The festivals and ceremonies which constitute the second part of my paper thus form the vehicle of expression of the national sentiment, and are all connected with the church.

The participation of the laity in church matters, especially in the election of its officials, is a chief reason for the essential oneness of church and people. Priests, bishops, and patriarchs, who constitute the three chief grades in the religious hierarchy, are chosen by the people.⁴ The approval of higher authorities is necessary in most cases, but this only slightly detracts from the importance of the rôle of the people. A married priest is the religious head of every parish, and he is elected either by a

² Ormanian p. 243.

³ *Ibid.* p. 177.

⁴ Uobicini, *Letters on Turkey*.

Ormanian pp. 151, 152.

direct process of voting or by a deed of presentation. The religious council of the diocese proceeds to examine the ability and qualifications of the candidate, who is ordained if his examination proves successful; if unsuccessful, a new candidate must be presented, for a bishop can not of his own initiative ordain a priest. The laity have no voice in the election of the celibate priesthood, which is only natural since the celibate priests are not in any way connected with the life of the community. Furthermore, they do not constitute a very important element, for when Ormanian wrote in 1911, there were only 400 celibate priests as against 4,000 married priests.⁵

The married priest is very closely identified with his community. He not only makes a regular practice of visiting the various households of the parish, but he is sole confessor of the people.⁶ As he officiates at masses and church ceremonies and promotes a general participation in the festivals, so also no betrothal, marriage, baptism, or funeral can be sanctioned without his presence. He is as well a kind of marriage agency, employment agency, and relief agency, acting always of course in coöperation with the council of elders of his parish. A priest called at the home of an Armenian lady I know, and remarked casually that he was aware she had a daughter, whom he was very anxious to see, for there were two young men of the community who were very desirous to marry. So the people inform the priest of their need and the priest does all in his power to help them. He does not receive a regular compensation, being absolutely dependent upon the voluntary offerings of his flock and the voluntary fees received for official services rendered.⁷ This works out sometimes to his advantage, but more often not, depending generally on whether his parish is poverty stricken or well-to-do.

There are several very curious usages practiced by the married priest. He is recruited from all classes of society, but more often there is a succession from father to son.⁸ The conditions demanded, besides parochial election, are acquaintance with ecclesiastical and liturgical matters, an exemplary life, and the consent of his wife. After his ordination he must fast for forty days. He then prepares himself for his first mass by a life of retreat in the church, restricting himself to a vegetable diet for twenty-four hours.⁹ The wife, who enjoys a certain precedence in society, observes a customary abstinence in the absence of her husband. One week or at least three days before the celebration of the mass, he keeps away from

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 173.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 141.

⁷ Ubicini, *Letters on Turkey*.

⁸ Ormanian p. 170.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Ubicini, *Letters on Turkey*.

Tavernier 1:498, 499.

home, passing the nights within the church. He may engage in domestic or even professional work so long as this does not interfere with the duties of his calling. Should his wife die, he may not marry again unless he lays aside his priestly robe, nor may a priest ever marry a widow. These practices are not dead letters, except that the custom of sojourning within the church for three nights before mass has, in Constantinople at least, been reduced to a single night.

The bishops are chosen as chiefs of dioceses by the council of the diocese, six sevenths of whose members are laymen, the remainder being ecclesiastics.¹⁰ The patriarchs, including the Katholikos, the supreme authority of the church whose seat is at Etchmiadzin, the religious center of the nation, are chosen by an electoral assembly of the religious heads (bishops or archbishops) and lay deputies who are nominated by the dioceses as a whole.¹¹ The eight members of the synod, which is an advisory body to the Katholikos, and the seven oldest members of the congregation at Etchmiadzin have equal share in voting. The electoral assembly, so constituted, chooses two candidates, one of whom is selected by the Czar. The Czar, after his selection is made, sends a deputy to meet the successful candidate, who is decorated and escorted with due ceremony to Etchmiadzin where he is officially ordained. There are only two patriarchates besides the see of Etchmiadzin, i.e., those of Constantinople and Jerusalem. The corresponding patriarchs are likewise chosen by a national assembly, six sevenths of whose members belong to the laity. The patriarchs of both Jerusalem and of Constantinople acknowledge the supremacy of the Katholikos of Etchmiadzin, who is thus head of the church, though not infallible.

The site of Etchmiadzin is the old capital city, Vagharshapat, the ruins of which are all but washed away; and it marks the spot where St. Gregory in his vision saw the descent of Jesus Christ. Etchmiadzin means, "Descent of the Only Begotten." The particular spot is commemorated by the central altar of the Cathedral, which is the chief church of the nation. This Cathedral is situated in the center of a huge court bounded in the form of a large rectangle by the cells of the monks, the long refectory building, the library, the theological seminary, and the residence of the Katholikos. Outside this rectangle are ranged buildings and open spaces, including the garden of the Katholikos, the court for pilgrims, the printing establishment, and dwellings for various uses, all of which is bounded by a huge wall in the form of a still larger rectangle about 1,000 feet in length and 700 feet in width.¹² The chapels of the martyrs are some distance from the

¹⁰ Ormanian p. 152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Lynch, chapter on Etchmiadzin.
Dubois 3:362, 363

monastery, the church of St. Gaiane, commemorating the spot of her martyrdom, being about one fourth of a mile distant, while the church of St. Rhipsime, which likewise honors the spot of Rhipsime's martyrdom, is about three fourths of a mile distant. The buildings now standing can hardly be those built by the saint.¹³

Etchmiadzin has been for many years a place of pilgrimage for the faithful. There is not only the sacred Cathedral where Jesus Christ is believed to have appeared; there is also the chamber of holy relics in the rear of the Cathedral which is perhaps the chief attraction and glory of the place. The most important of the relics here kept is a hand of St. Gregory, or rather right arm, "atch," as it is called, now preserved in a silver case, and which was considered at one time to be a necessary appanage of the patriarchal dignity. The poor hand of the saint has been the cause of many peregrinations in consequence.¹⁴ One patriarch seized it and carried it off with him in order to justify his claims. Another restole it and brought it back to Etchmiadzin, while others have pretended possession of the holy "atch," in order to make good their claims. It was with this relic as well as with the holy chrism that consecrations were performed, which made possession of it a necessary condition of the patriarchal authority. Another much revered relic is the fragment of the ark, which the angel who appeared to St. Jacob gave to him as a reward for his perseverance in attempting so impossible a task as the climbing of Ararat. Still another is the head of the "holy spear" which was thrust into the side of Christ by the Roman soldier at Golgotha.¹⁵ There are others of lesser importance, some of which are believed to possess the power of effecting cures.

Such in brief are the broader and more important facts relating to the church, which has thus come to sanction the festivals and ceremonies that make up the second part of this thesis. These, as I have said, naturally divide themselves into three groups, first those that have been taken over bodily from the past; second, new festivals and ceremonies created by the church; and third the ceremonies of common life with which the church has identified itself. In the first group are included the midsummer festival of Vartavar, the spring festival, the festival in commemoration of the dead, Fortune-Telling Day, and the festival of Vartan's Day. All except the last have their origin in pagan festivals; each one has been taken over by the church and made its own.

¹³ See p. 30 of this thesis, note 32.

¹⁴ Ormanian p. 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

For the relation of the church to the Turkish and Russian Governments see Lynch 1:269, also Ubacini, *Letters on Turkey*.

CHAPTER II

PAGAN FOLK FESTIVALS

SECTION 1. VARTAVAR AND THE FESTIVAL OF MIHR

Vartavar, meaning "flaming of the rose," was celebrated in pagan times in honor of Anahit, goddess of chastity, at midsummer. The central act of the festival was the offering of a dove and a rose to her golden image. With the introduction of Christianity the temple and the image were destroyed, and it may be noted that upon the site of the Temple of Anahit in Vagharshapat was built the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin. This would lead to the strange conclusion that in the vision of St. Gregory, Jesus Christ descended upon a pagan temple. The fact seems to be that this marvelous vision was seen by a pious monk who published a life of St. Gregory some two or three centuries after the Illuminator's death.¹ But the festival became the "Festival of the Transfiguration of Christ," although the name Vartavar still remains, and doves are still set flying.²

The festival is celebrated differently in various places. Upon the mountains of Armenia every family brings a sheep for sacrifice, adorned with colored papers and pigments, and as the sheep approach the shrine, lighted candles are fixed upon their horns.³ Sheaves of grain, fruit, flowers, and doves are also brought as sacrifices, while dust from beside the altar is carried home to children as a talisman to help them to learn their A B C's. In the absence of a church on the mountainside, which is usually the case, a large white tent with crosses is put up beside some sacred spring, with which the country abounds. The spring is necessary, for on this day the people amuse themselves by throwing water upon each other. For this reason the day is often called Armenian Water Day. After the doves are set flying, the priest sprinkles the people, and they in turn sprinkle water over each other. This practice probably dates to the legend of the deluge, the Universal Baptism with which God cleansed His sinful earth. The dove and the baptism are also suggestive of the baptism of Jesus by John in the waters of Jordan. This part of the festival is probably an addition to the pagan rite, for the sprinkling of the water is symbolic of love and forgiveness; it is carried on with much laughing and merry-making. The festival includes also a kind of fair, for the people have to show what progress they have made during the year in art and the various handi-crafts. Races, competitions, and games are held, and the victors are crowned with wreaths of roses, so that even the rose continues to have

¹ That is, Pseudo Agathangelus.

² Raffi p. 128.

³ *Ibid.*

an important place in the festivities as it had in pagan days. The sprinkling of water, the games, the races, show how happy a time the people must have on this day; the exhibition of the year's accomplishment in handicraft and art points out the more serious side; while the essential religious symbolism is very clearly emphasized. What may also be noted is that there is entertainment for all, old and young, serious and frivolous. The pious-minded may sit on the mountainside contemplating the religious aspect of it all; the gay and light-hearted may sprinkle water over each other; the young and strong may run races and play games; men and women of a practical turn of mind may visit the fair and note the progress made during the year; and children may roll about on the mountainsides or gather roses, for these are in full bloom at this time.

The pagan spring festival in honor of Mihr, the god of fire, was taken over by the church to commemorate the bringing of the Babe Jesus to the temple, where Mary sacrificed two doves according to the custom of purification.⁴ The ancient rite consisted of kindling fires in the open market places in honor of the god Mihr, and of lighting a lantern from one of the newly kindled fires, which was kept burning in the temple throughout the year. As now celebrated, on February 26, every young man who has been married within the year brings a load of aromatic shrubs, making a huge pile of them in the yard of the church. A religious service is held in the open air at evening-time, after which the priest sets fire to the pile. All the villagers, men, women, and children, dance about the fire, while boys and young men show their agility and courage by leaping over it. When the flames die down, each person carries home a glowing brand and places it on the hearthstone for good luck.

The description of the festival by Abeghian shows how a general celebration of this kind varies in particulars from place to place.⁵ On the afternoon of the 13th of February,⁶ which is the day before the church festival of the purification, a pile of wood consisting usually of thorn-wood, cane, and straw is gathered together in the churchyard. The entire community comes together in the church on the night of the same day, each person provided with a candle. After the vespers all stand about the pile of shrub and wood, the newly married during the year making the first row. The candles are lighted from the church light, and after the priest has blessed the pile, it is set ablaze from all sides, after which the candles are put out. As soon as the fire has died down, the candles are relighted from the glowing embers which are regarded as sacred, and carried home

⁴ Sekleian's *Tales*. Preface by Blackwell.

⁵ Abeghian pp. 72-74.

⁶ The 13th of February according to the old style calendar corresponds to the 26th of February of the Latin calendar.

where they are used to light a pile of shrub and wood that has been gathered on the roof of the house. The young people jump over the fire while the young women and married women march around it saying, "May it not itch me, and may I not receive any scabs," taking care just to singe the border of their dresses. The ashes, as well as the half-burned wood-stuffs are preserved, or scattered in the four corners of the barn, over the fields or in the garden, for the ashes and flames of the firebrands are believed to protect people and cattle from sickness and the fruit trees from worms and caterpillars. In the homes of the newly married the festival is celebrated with music and dance, the young couples especially making it a point to dance about the sacred flames, while in some places special food is prepared in honor of the occasion.

Various prophesies are made during the festival, for example, if the flame and smoke blows to the east, it is a sign of a good harvest for the coming year, if toward the west, a bad growth is expected.

In recent years the religious authorities at Etchmiadzin printed the following prohibition in the church calendar: "It is forbidden to run about the fire." But the festival is celebrated nevertheless.⁷ That it originates in the pagan festival held in honor of Mihr there is little doubt, for the month of February corresponds to the ancient Armenian month Mehanakan, which, translated into modern Armenian, Mihragan, means belonging to Mihr, or more loosely, the Festival of Mihr.

SECTION 2. THE DAY OF THE DEAD AND VARTAN'S DAY

The festival in commemoration of the dead is celebrated on the first day after Easter, and may be regarded as a reaction against the lenten fasts. Families of Armenians, loaded with picnic baskets, packages of food, and bottles of wine, flock to their cemeteries in great numbers. Priests are paid small fees for standing over the graves of the dead to chant prayers for the salvation of the departed souls. Over the graves of the recently dead stand the bereaved relatives of the deceased, lamenting loudly and bewailing a fate which they know must some day be their own. A more maudlin spectacle could not be imagined. Here and there are seated groups of families eating and drinking and laughing all the more heartily for the enforced abstinence of the preceding weeks; while standing beside this grave or that is a priest in black robe and high hat, chanting a prayer for the dead, and incidentally earning his daily bread. Eating seems to be the chief amusement; even the mourners eat after they have faithfully mourned, and the priests too come in for their shares after all possible fees have been earned. Altogether it is a post-lenten festival in the full meaning of the term, and much in contrast to the wholesome enjoyment and the

⁷ Abeghian p. 72.

light-hearted gaiety so characteristic of Vartavar. It has been witnessed in Constantinople by Armenians I know, who have given accounts to me. Whether or not it is carried out in this manner in the villages and rural districts I am not aware, but I should be very much surprised to learn that it was, for I should certainly regard the festival in this form as a product of the artificiality of city life. In the absence of wholesome amusements and of the community solidarity characteristic of the Armenian village, contact with city-bred folk would inevitably result in a shift of standards of judgment and valuation, together with a break-up in old habits of thought and life; and as the people have no common play-ground, so to speak, except the poor denuded cemetery allotted them by the Turkish government, one can well excuse the ugliness of the spectacle. The Armenian has Vartavar, a real festival, and need not look with shame upon this festival in commemoration of the dead.

This same offering of sacrifice for the dead is carried on in a variety of ways. In Armenian villages the family of the deceased prepares a lamb or a kid with rice, and on the day of the funeral pieces of it are given to the attendants; given, as they say, and taken, in sacrifice for the dead. The practice in Constantinople is somewhat different, although the idea is exactly the same. Forty days after the death of an individual, or perhaps on the anniversary of the death, the bereaved family prepares a lamb or a kid with rice, which is distributed to the people in small pots, and given, as they say, in sacrifice for the dead. The Greek custom in this respect is most absurd. At the head of the casket, which is left open, two men march in the funeral procession carrying a wide tray filled with boiled wheat and sugar, and trailing a piece of black crape. After the burial this is distributed to the mourners in handfuls, again in sacrifice for the dead. Libations set aside and poured out in Roman days are illustrative of the same thing. That these practices are not Christian but distinct survivals of pagan festivals and customs is very clear.

The above conclusions, namely, first that the festival as I described it is an aberration of city life, and second, that although identified with the church it is distinctly pagan in character, are borne out by Abeghian, whose material, as an Armenian who for many years lived in the little Armenian village of Astapat, is distinctly first-hand.⁸ Worship of the deceased, he says, begins immediately after death. Each departed soul, and especially those of elderly people, requires particular honor on the first day after death, and during the ensuing year. It is for this reason a great misfortune for an Armenian peasant not to have a child. A still greater misfortune, however, it is to die in a strange land where there are none to care for the departed soul. That a curious evolution has taken place

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 20.

The remainder of the paragraph is a free translation of selected parts of pp. 20-22.

in these requirements is very clear. In the beginning, satisfactions of a material kind were required, something to eat and to drink, and accordingly the custom arose of placing bread upon the heart of the dead, or sanctified bread in the cavity of the mouth and incense in the nostrils. Then there arose the idea of facilitating the journey of the departed into the beyond, and of making the future life of the soul a happier one. For example, Armenians generally bathe the bodies of their dead in blessed water, and wash the clothes of the deceased on the day following burial for the purification of the soul so that it may arrive spotless at its destination. Since the soul has been cleansed of all sin through the symbolic washing of the body and clothes, no more covering is required for the body than a large white cloth. No other color is permissible. Should the deceased be more than ten years of age, candles or oil lamps are burned during eight days over the spot where the body was bathed in order to lighten the way of the soul into the beyond. According to old beliefs, the destination of the departed soul is a place of darkness, and hence two candles are placed in the hands of the dead immediately after the bath in order that he may recognize his friends and relatives in the world beyond. At frequent intervals during the first year, food and drink are brought to the cemetery, and placed upon the grave. There is weeping, eating, and drinking at these times, and what food is left over is always placed over the grave.

The souls of the righteous are thought of as luminous, the wicked as black. Accordingly the blessed are called "spirits of light."⁹ In order to possess a bright soul one must have performed good works, of which giving alms to the poor is considered the most important. Such spirits are also called "generous," "charitable." It is a current belief that the blackened souls become brighter through the good works of descendants, as well as through their prayers. Offspring are thus especially desirable, and the old Armenian liturgy, the *Maschtotz* prepared by St. Mesrob, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century, contains innumerable prayers for the dead.¹⁰ The prayers are short and their power is relative to the frequency of repetition rather than to the length. Some sort of short prayer is repeated with every thought of the dead, as for example, "May God have mercy upon his soul"; "May his soul become lightened"; or only "The illuminated soul."

Several days of the year are set apart for particular remembrance of the dead.¹¹ At these times the departed spirits are supposed to come down from heaven and to roam about the vicinity of their graves or in the homes of their relatives. On the eve of these days it is necessary to do honor to

⁹ Abeghian p. 22.

¹⁰ *Maschtotz*, St. Mesrob. One third of the book is devoted to this purpose.

¹¹ Ormanian p. 189.

their memory with incense and candles, which are regarded as offerings. The odor of the incense is especially pleasant to spirits, for the incense-tree also blooms in paradise.¹² Saturday night is very commonly devoted to such intercession and worship. Incense is burned upon the hearth while prayers are repeated, or a flame is ignited upon a plate which is carried into all the corners of the house, or barn, or wherever it is believed the departed spirit may be wandering. In some places it is customary to maintain the "light of the dead" throughout the night in order that the spirits may enter the house. If they find the house dark in looking through the roof window, they make away, cursing. Water is not drunk in the dark during these nights, for it is believed that to do so would be to take it away from the thirsty spirits of the dead.

On the Day of the Dead the spirits are especially honored, for they love most to wander in the neighborhood of their graves. People actually feel themselves to be among the souls of the dead on this celebration day. The latter are very happy to be thought of, and are especially glad to have their graves blessed by the priests. But to please them most one must bring wood and incense and leave it to be burned over their graves. Three days the spirits remain upon the earth, after which they return to heaven, their visit having been duly honored. If they come to find themselves forgotten, they curse their relatives and fly away in despair. Occasionally they come down to be of service; especially is this true of the dead father and his living son, for the former is especially remembered, and his grave is regarded as holy. Armenians swear by the graves, or by the spirits of their fathers, and call upon them for help in time of especial need.¹³

Tavernier described the same festival in his *Voyages* and noticed that it was considered the greatest infamy to eat with a "Mordischou," the person who washed the dead.¹⁴ No single festival and group of relevant beliefs is more instructive in showing how much of Armenian folk-belief and custom is the survival of paganism.

There is yet another festival of this group, which, however, is not to be traced to paganism, and it would be a mistake to suppose that the church is connected with it in the same way and to the same extent as it is with the first three festivals considered. The festival is called Vartan's Day, and although the church sanctions the festival and sets apart a day for the celebration, it comes about as near being apart from the church as any single festival. Vartan was the general of the Armenian army defeated at the battle of Avarair, spoken of in Part One, by the Persian fire-worshippers who endeavored to impose their religion upon the Armenians at a time when part of Armenia was under the domination of

¹² Abeghian p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid.* This and preceding paragraph are a free translation from selected sentences of pp. 23 and 24.

¹⁴ Tavernier 1:507-9.

Persia, and the remainder tributary to Rome. But though defeated in battle, the moral victory, as people now use the term, was Armenian, for the battle proved the utter failure of the Persians to convert the Armenian people to their religion.¹⁵ Vartan saved the nation for Gregorian Christianity, and it is significant that the people look upon Vartan as saviour of the nation rather than as saviour of their religion, showing how the religion was and still is identified with the nation.

It is in his honor that the people hold a festival on the anniversary day of the battle of Avarair. School children sing songs and wreath Vartan's picture with red flowers. The belief is that this peculiar kind of red flower sprang up from the blood of the Christian army. Recitations and national patriotic plays are given, and as the children participate in singing songs, reciting pieces, and rendering plays, the older people participate in attending them.¹⁶

Besides the belief of the red flower there are numerous other beliefs hallowed by the day. Nightingales that fly over the battlefield are supposed to sing "Vartan, Vartan," and there is a species of antelope with a pouch of fragrant musk under its throat which is said to have acquired its fragrance by browsing on herbage wet with the blood of Armenian heroes.¹⁷

Altogether it is the kind of festival to give expression to the sentiment I have spoken of as love for the country, for its mountains, rivers, and valleys, and for its ideals of freedom, independence, and strength. In the presence of the state the festival probably would be utilized to foster and give expression to the sentiment of loyalty to the state. There would be specially chosen speakers to talk of patriotism, waving of banners, and carefully designed methods of instilling hatred for a real or supposed enemy, much as French school children have been taught to hate Englishmen. But in the absence of the state, the sentiment expressed must be a purer sentiment, loftier and freer, and one can not but regret that Vartan's Day and similar festivals have been suppressed by the Turkish government. And yet, one could not reasonably expect otherwise.

SECTION 3. FORTUNE-TELLING DAY

Most charming and most picturesque of festivals is that participated in by the romantic Armenian maidens on the early dawn of Ascension Day.¹⁸ On the eve of the same day the young girls who wish their fortunes told, decorate a large bowl with specially selected flowers, after which each girl casts a token, a ring, a brooch, a thimble, into the bowl. Flowers of several kinds are then put in, and the bowl is filled with water

¹⁵ *Elisée*.

¹⁶ Lidgett, *Ancient People*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Raffi p. 158.

drawn from seven springs. Then they cover it with an embroidered cloth and take it by night to the priest who says a prayer over it. The most carefully and daintily prepared bowl is then placed out in the moonlight, open to the stars where it is left until dawn. At early daybreak of the next morning, the maidens, furnished with provisions for the entire day, go out of the village carrying their bowl to the side of a spring, the foot of a mountain, or into an open field, gathering on the way various kinds of flowers with which they deck themselves. Having arrived at their place of festival, they play games, dance, and sing, after which they take a beautiful little girl, too young to tell where the sun rises, who has been previously chosen and gaily dressed for the occasion, to draw the various articles out of the bowl. The face of the child is covered with a richly wrought veil that she may not see what is in the bowl, and she then proceeds to withdraw the articles which she holds in her hand one at a time. While this is done some one of the party recites a charm song, and the owner of each token takes the song which accompanies it as her fortune.

There are thousands of these charm songs, most of which have been written especially for the festival, of which I shall give but a few.

1.

Snowless hang the clouds to-night,
Through the darkness comes a light;
On this lonely pillow now,
Never more shall sleep alight.

2.

Like a star whose brightness grows
On the earth my beauty shows;
Thou shalt long for yet, and seek
My dark eyes and arching brows.

3.

Long and lone this night to me
Passing slow and wearily;
Passing full of sighs and tears—
Love, what doth it bring to thee?

4.

Eden's smile my vineyard wore,
Flowers bloomed, a goodly store;
Handsome youth and ugly maid—
This was never seen before!¹⁹

¹⁹ Translated by Miss Boyadjian, *Armenian Legends and Poetry*.

After the first and third lines of the charm song, the following line is sung, which I give in the German of Abeghian:

“Liebe Rose meine, liebe, liebe.”

and after the second and fourth lines:

“Liebe Blume meine, liebe, liebe.” (Abeghian p. 65.)

There are thousands of similarly constructed folk-songs treating a variety of subjects current among the people, many of which have been collected by an Armenian by the name of Tcheraz, whose book, unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain. Miss Boyadjian has collected a few of them in her *Armenian Legends and Poetry*. However, I shall mention only such as are relevant to the festivals to be described.

Thus each one carries its bit of prophesy, daintily and prettily expressed, which when sung at the foot of some mountain, in the bright eastern sunlight of the morning, while a little child is holding tokens beside a bowl surrounded by the group of beflowered maidens, makes as complete and charming a picture as one could well imagine.

Many curious beliefs, superstitions, customs, and legends are directly related to Ascension Day. It is believed, for example, that on the eve of this day the water of the springs, brooks, and rivers lies peacefully motionless for a single moment during the night. At the same moment heaven and earth, mountain and stone, trees and flowers beckon and congratulate one another. First heaven congratulates and kisses the earth, then one star beckons to another, one flower to another, and so forth until all of nature's objects have expressed their mutual good feeling. Even plants and "soulless" objects receive the gift of speech and share their secrets one with the other at this time. He who hides himself in a stone crevice of the mountainside may listen to the conversation of stones and flowers, and understand what they tell each other. They tell on this night what sort of sicknesses they and the springs will heal, and many people endeavor to attend at this moment, but only a few succeed.²⁰

At midnight the waters are believed to have the power of healing, and people bathe themselves in the streams. As the children are not to be troubled during the night, water is warmed for them the next morning, bits of grass are thrown in and the children are bathed. During the magic moment the door of the cavern of "Maher," the revered hero god who dwells upon earth, is opened; and one may enter to see him, his steed, and the "wheel of the starred heavens" or the wheel of fate. In one of the national epics (David of Sassun) Maher is represented as the strongest of the heroes, and is supposed to dwell in a rocky cave in the vicinity of Van²¹ (probably the rock of Van). In this cave all of the world's riches are heaped up, and the "wheel of the world," the wheel of fate which constantly turns assigning to people their destinies, stands there. Maher looks continually at the wheel and if it should stand still, he comes out of his cavern to ravage the world. The door of the cave is made of stone and covered with cuneiform inscriptions. It is locked during the entire year except for the night of the ascension of Christ, when it is opened during the single magic moment. Whosoever perceives this moment may step into the cave and take as much gold as he pleases. The idea of the "wheel of fortune" is considerably extant, although it is not always understood as separated from heaven and connected with Maher.²² That

²⁰ Abeghian pp. 61-62.

²¹ *World's Great Classic Series*. Section on Armenian literature, with introduction by Robert Arnot. See David of Sassun pp. 57-79.

²² Abeghian p. 51, 52.

Emin, *Ancient Armenian Legends*.

the idea of fate or of fortune is generally associated with the day, not only by romantic maidens, but by the people, is very evident.

The flowing waters are believed to change into gold during the silent minute, and if one places an object in the water and wishes at the same time that it become gold, the object turns to gold. Accordingly the young men and women go to the springs and rivers in order to draw water, trusting their fates that they may select the happy moment. Superstitions and magic are not lacking, for while one member of a party seats himself upon a pair of fire-tongs in the fashion of a rider, another performs likewise upon a long-handled spit. The iron tools are also regarded as a necessary protection against the calls that one hears behind after the water has been drawn, for if one should look back perchance, he would surely fall under the influence of the evil spirits. The oldest of the party carries a gourd flask full of wheat and barley, which is poured into the stream towards midnight with the words "I give you wheat and barley; you give me everything that is good." Thereupon he fills the gourd flask with water, and the party hurries homeward to discover the gold.²³

The fortune-telling festival is given by Abeghian as he observed it in his home village, and I shall give a free translation of his account at this point because of a few interesting variations. In Astapet, the festival is called the "Festival of the Mother of Flowers." On the day before Ascension Day the girls and young women of the village divide themselves into two groups, one to gather special sorts of flowers from the mountainside, while the other goes to "steal" water from seven springs, or seven rivers. The "thieves" must not see each other, nor must the people of the village know aught of what is happening. Having filled their vessels with water, each throws a stone into the spring and then they turn back, taking care neither to look about, to set down their vessels, nor to talk. They imagine that the mountains, the valleys, trees, and meadows call out behind them and if they should turn about they would be turned to stone.²⁴

At night of the same day the "water thieves" and flower gatherers meet together in a garden to prepare the "Havgir" or magic bowl in which is poured the water from the seven springs, and in which seven stones from the seven sources, together with leaves of the gathered flowers are dropped. Each one who wishes her fortune told now throws in a charm token, such as mentioned before. Those who are not present send their tokens in order to have them thrown into the "Havgir" by others. The bowl is then adorned with flowers, after which the "Vicak" meaning

²³ Abeghian p. 62.

²⁴ These beliefs are analogous to those in connection with the bringing of healing water, or the water of perpetual life, the source of which is guarded by monsters, snakes, and scorpions. The hero steals cautiously to the source in order not to be observed by the watchmen, fills his vessel with water and hurries away, for the mountains and trees call out to warn the guardians of the source who awake and follow the hero. (*Ibid.* p. 63.)

destiny or fate, is prepared. This consists of two pieces of wood tied together in the form of a cross, which is dressed and adorned with jewels and pearls to make it appear as a newly-married doll-bride. The "Vicak" is fastened to the "Havgir," and both are placed under the stars, in order that these who are the real destinies, may work the proper magic upon the charm tokens.²⁵ A few girls guard it during the whole night against the young men who try to steal it.

Early the next morning the maidens gather together in the garden laden with food baskets and prepared to make a day of it. The "Havgir" and strangely fashioned "Vicak" are carried to a nearby spring, the young girls decking themselves with flowers as they go. The spring is decorated about with flowers, green leaves, and branches, and the "Havgir" is placed in the middle, and then after they have prepared everything and eaten, the oldest among them takes the "Vicak," kisses it, gives it to another, who does likewise, and so it passes from hand to hand. Finally a seven-year-old girl receives it. She sets herself in the middle of the group and holds the "Vicak" while the "Havgir" stands before her. The little girl is called "bride," is the interpreter of the "Vicak" and is specially selected and dressed for the occasion. When she has received the "Vicak" a red veil is passed over both, and all is ready for the central event of the festival. A charm song is sung by the group, and after each stanza the "bride" draws a token from the vessel. The preceding verse reveals the fate of the one to whom the token belongs.²⁶

The fortune-telling festival of Ascension morning stands quite alone. Bodeful of the future and suggestive of the past, it can not but have a serious tenor, for there are maidens whose lovers have not been born, as there are also sadder ones. Perhaps they do not take their verses very seriously. Whether they do or not there is always the charm of sunrise colors, and the out-of-doors that makes it as beautiful as it is romantic. The best of the future, their brightest hope, the best of the present, warmth of sunshine and color, and the best of the past, their golden dreams of youth, are brought together on this day and given a common expression in a way that must charm them as it charms the observer. Festivals to be perfect festivals must be out-of-doors and the day must be bright.

²⁵ This part of the festivities is also accompanied with song. In Astapet the following song is sung by way of introduction:

"Holt einen grossen Meister,
Lasset ihn den Hochzeitsrock meines geliebten zuschneiden
Die Sonne sei der Stoff
Der Mond diene als Futter.
Stellt aus Wolken die Einfassung her,
Wickelt aus dem Meer Seidengarn,
Befestigt die Sterne in einer Reihe als Knopfe,
Näht die ganze Liebe hinein." (Abeghian p. 64.)

²⁶ Abeghian pp. 63-66.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIAN FOLK FESTIVALS

The second group of festivals comprises those newly created by the church, such as the Blessing of the Grapes, New Year, Easter, and Christmas. I wish also to include in this group a few of the peculiarly characteristic church ceremonies which also have a distinct festival value for the people, i.e., the ceremony of the "Washing of Feet" on Maundy Thursday, "Khatchanguist" or the "Blessing of Water," the consecration of the Katholikos, and the manufacture of the "holy oil."

SECTION 1. CHRISTMAS, EASTER, AND NEW YEAR

The service of the church on any one of the festival days is exclusively connected with the divine mystery, so called. These include the Assumption, or Immaculate Conception, celebrated by the people in the festival "the Blessing of the Grapes"; the miraculous birth, which corresponds to the Christmas festival; the Transfiguration, or the folk-festival Vartavar; the Redemption, to which the Easter festival corresponds; and the Resurrection, including Ascension or Fortune-Telling Day. There are other festivals celebrated by the church, such as the festival of the Holy Cross, and of the Holy Church, which I omit because there is not a corresponding social expression. Grand mass is said at the church, and the particular passages of scripture that have a direct bearing on the occasion are read. The Armenian calendar is curious in that many of the festivals occupy a succession of days; there are, for example, 39 days for the Resurrection, 3 days for the Transfiguration, 10 days for the Ascension, etc., which make up a grand total of 136 days in the year to which festivals are assigned. As there are 160 days devoted to abstinence, 117 of which are liturgical abstinence, that is, days of penitence mentioned in the liturgy, there are left only 112 days for the commemoration of saints, which have necessarily to be grouped together, since there are more than 112 saints.¹ Because, therefore, of the continuity of festival days, one could not expect any one of the festivals to have any social value from the standpoint of the church service. But there is never any conflict between the services of the church and the festivities without, which are thus sanctioned by the church and in many cases directed and carried out by church officials. It has been noticed that the blessing of the priest was secured for the magic bowl, before it was placed underneath the stars on the eve of Ascension Day.

The festival of the Virgin Mary, or the "Blessing of the Grapes," is more actively participated in by the church. It may be designed to keep the

¹ Ormanian pp. 189-90.

people from eating green grapes, but more probably was intended to give a social expression to an otherwise dull and very monotonous church ceremony. The people are all expected to maintain a strict abstinence from eating grapes until the middle of August, the day set apart for the festival. The grapes are then gathered in great quantities, some of which are carried to the church and placed on a large tray, which is set at the foot of the altar. After the ceremony of the church, the priest turns to the tray of grapes before him, which he blesses with his cross. The tray is then taken to the door of the church, where each member of the congregation is given a bunch as he passes out. The fast is thus broken with the taste of "blessed grapes," and there is no end of grape eating on that day. During the remainder of the day every woman named Mary, or named with a possible attribute of the Virgin Mary, as "Kudsa," meaning "saintly," or "Dirouhi," meaning "Mother of the Lord," keeps open house for the friends who drop in to eat grapes and to congratulate her. In rural places or villages where vineyards are abundant, social groups may be seen eating grapes from the vines while talking or playing as they are inclined. Grapes ripen earlier in some parts of Armenia than in others, and where this is true the festival is merged with the festival of Vartavar.²

For the festival of New Year's Eve no religious coöperation whatever is necessary; it comes as near to being distinct from the church as any of the Armenian festivals. The preparation consists largely in making or purchasing gifts for the various members of the family, in cracking bowls of nuts and getting all kinds of dried fruits ready. Armenian and Greek New Year's Eve fall on the same night, and in Constantinople there is much agitation and animation in the streets. Singing and music fill the air, and as soon as dusk falls, groups of boys, some carrying small lanterns, others provided with tom-toms or hand-organs, begin the circuit of the streets. Thus they go from house to house singing the New Year's song and playing their hand-organs, receiving pennies as they go. After the boys have passed along, the porters, watchmen, and firemen make a noisy procession down the streets, they too playing hand-organs and stopping at one house after another where they receive a drink, some sweets and nuts, and most important of all, a tip. As midnight approaches, the excitement increases; the pounding of the tom-toms becomes unbearable, all the organs of the neighborhood are making music, and there is such a noise of singing, shouting, and laughing as can be compared only to a night of political election. Inside the homes of the better-to-do, the children are put to bed for a time while the enormous New Year's table

² For the ritual side of this festival, the church ceremony known as the Blessing of the Crops, or the Blessing of Harvest, and the prayers in connection therewith, F. C. Conybeare's *Ritual Armenorum*, and St. Mesrob's *Maschtolz* may be consulted. The social side I have gotten from my wife who has taken part in the festival several times.

is set. Besides several specially prepared New Year's dishes, every home must be provided with a dish of every kind of fruit, dried or fresh. Small candles are stuck around the plates, and the presents are heaped up on a side table. At midnight the candles are all lit, and the family ranges itself around the table while the eldest, usually the grandmother, blesses all and prays. After the prayer she wishes to all the best things for the coming year, for the young ladies good husbands, for the young men prosperity and good wives, happiness for the little children, and comfort and health for the older ones. These wishes having been given, all kiss the hands of the older members of the family, after which the children kiss each others' hands. The presents are exchanged; fruits, candies, and nuts are partaken of, and the fun goes on until dawn.³ In the interior of Armenia, two elders of the church go from door to door of the more fortunate ones on the day before New Year, carrying bags which they fill with the offerings received at every house. These are carefully parceled out and at dusk are left at the doors of poor families who would otherwise have no New Year's cheer.

The church makes up amply in the Easter festival for any lack of participation at New Year. Forty-eight days of rigid lenten abstinence, during which time no meat is eaten, precede the festivities of Easter Day. The first two or three days of the Holy Week are given over to housecleaning, which however must be finished by Thursday in order that the people may attend the ceremonies at church which continue until Easter Day. On Thursday afternoon "the Washing of the Feet," to be described later, commences, and the service continues until past midnight. On Saturday all go to the bath, which is made an essential part of the week's celebrations, and on the afternoon of the same day the real Easter service, called the Lighting of the Lights, begins. The church is first illuminated on Easter Eve, for on the three preceding days of mourning and sorrow the altar shrine is kept closed and no candles are lit. Even the congregation holds lighted wax candles while the triumphal songs are chanted by the robed choir of little boys.

At the evening meal of the day before Easter the lenten fast is partly broken by eating fish and boiled eggs, but no meat.⁴ The denial of the flesh recommences, however, at bedtime, for not a morsel is eaten until Easter midday. Early dawn sees the people putting on their new clothes, especially new shoes which are considered a necessity on this day, and all, newly attired, go to church where communion is celebrated. The church is usually filled with flowers and its most brilliant ornaments are displayed,

³ A very common custom, especially in the interior villages of Armenia, is to give a lighted candle and an apple or orange in which small silver coins have been stuck, as gifts to the children. This is done by the eldest member of the family, usually the grandmother, at the time the younger ones come up to kiss her hand and receive her blessing.

⁴ For a description of the Easter and Christmas fasts, see Tavernier, *Voyages* 1:497-98.

the service ending at midday in time for the usual feast of stuffed roast lamb, the customary red eggs, and the egg bread made only at Easter time. In the afternoon the men visit from house to house and something dainty is always served, a cocktail or a cup of coffee with sweets like Turkish delight or bonbons. The formula repeated by the guest upon entering a house is always the same; "Christ is risen from the dead," he exclaims, and is answered by the host with the usual formula, "Blessed is the resurrection of Christ."

Perhaps the boys enjoy Easter most of all. Provided with red Easter eggs, they collect in groups, whereupon there follows a most vivacious competition to win each other's eggs by clashing them together. The champion egg is used until it is broken, when a new champion is quickly brought forth. This process continues as long as there are two or more unbroken eggs, the game being won when all of the broken eggs are in the possession of the boy who holds the champion egg. Picnic day, or the "Day of the Dead," follows Easter Day, as I have described it, and it is singularly strange that a "day of resurrection" should be followed by a "day of the dead," when prayers are said and offerings given in sacrifice for the departed. But people are not mindful of such little incongruities; they are simple and carry out the festival celebrated by their fathers, much as their fathers celebrated it.

The week before Christmas is likewise devoted to a thorough house-cleaning by the Armenian housewife, and on the day before, special dishes are prepared for the next day's feast. Again there is the customary bath which is observed by all the members of the household. On Christmas Eve the abstinence of the preceding days is partly broken, usually with fried fish, lettuce, and boiled spinach. Boiled spinach is the rule because it is believed that this dish made up the supper of the Virgin Mary on the eve of Christ's birth. At church special vespers are sung and there is much emphasis laid upon special selections from the prophets which are also sung. An hour before dawn the sexton alone, or with a group of choir boys, goes from door to door singing what is called "the good tidings." It is the signal for the faithful to awake, don their best clothes and go to church again without eating breakfast. The holy bread and wine are not to be profaned by the people having eaten a breakfast of ordinary food, with the consequence that not a few faint during the service, even as at Easter time. But the ceremony is finished by half past ten, after which the women go home to prepare the midday feast while the men visit the homes of their friends. The never-failing formula of the guest upon entering the house of a friend is, "Christ is born and manifested to-day," which is responded to by the host with "Blessed is the manifestation of Christ." Each visit lasts about fifteen minutes and sweets and coffee are served. At midday the Christmas

feast is partaken of, all make merry around the table, and in the afternoon more calls are paid and received. The festivities are observed for three days, the third being ladies' day, which is devoted by the ladies to giving and receiving visits. They offer their salutations and good wishes to each other, eating dainties even as the men. Shops and business places of Armenians are usually kept closed for three days.⁵

There is thus considerable similarity between Easter and the Christmas festivities, which is probably due to more or less sameness in the church ceremonies. These ceremonies, always well attended, are made attractive to the people by beautiful displays of flowers, vested choir boys, the charm of whose singing can only be understood by those who have heard them; also by special singing, not by the congregation, but by those who can sing, and with such enticing little additions as the Lighting of Lights. The services are thus as much and as real a part of the day's rejoicings as the feasts and social visits, and if they are designed consciously or unconsciously to give active expression to the sentiment of loyalty to the church one must admit that the expression is a perfectly free and natural one. Abstinences do not make the festivities attractive, to be sure, and there are more unfortunate communities who can not afford so lavish a display as others; but flowers need only to be picked from the fields, and boys there are always, even in the poorest churches. The holiday rejoicing has somewhat more of the serious blend which is to be contrasted with the more perfect gaiety of New Year's Day, and is probably due to the weightiness of its religious significance of which one is constantly reminded, not only by the services at the church but also by the salutations of visitors and the necessary replies, always the same. But even the gaiety of New Year is not to be compared with the perfect lightness and freedom of merriment that characterize some aspects of Vartavar, nor do any of the Christian folk festivals have the completeness of Vartavar.

SECTION 2. SPECIAL CHURCH CEREMONIES

Together with this second group of festivals including as they do Christmas, Easter, New Year, and the Blessing of the Grapes, I wish to include a short series of church ceremonies all of which have a very distinct festival value, beside their value in being singularly characteristic of the Armenian church. They are distinctly different from the festivals of the preceding section, in that the festivities are incidental to a ceremony peculiar to the Armenian church. The "Washing of Feet," the "Blessing of the Water," the consecration of the Katholikos, and the manufacture of the holy oil, are those I desire to describe.

⁵ The festivals of New Year's Day, Easter, and Christmas, I have described as related to me by my wife who has celebrated them in company with others in Constantinople. Such variations practiced in the interior of Armenia as I am aware of, I have indicated.

The "Washing of Feet" occurs on Maundy Thursday, three days before Easter.⁶ This day is the first of three successive days of mourning spoken of, during which the altar is closed, and no lights are lit. After the mass the bishop puts away his brocaded robes, and kneeling in imitation of Christ washing the feet of His disciples on the night of the betrayal, he washes the feet of the priests and choristers, of whom there are usually eleven. Christ washed the feet of twelve, but one of them was unworthy. The service then continues until midnight, and while the ceremony is in progress, the lights are put out one by one, to remain out until the "Lighting of the Lights" on Easter eve. If the church is a parish church in which a priest officiates, a number of little boys are ranged in order for the "Washing of Feet," which in this case is performed by the priest, who anoints the soles of their feet with oil after he has washed them. Each boy is given a walnut shell and before he moves from his place he carefully scrapes some of the oil into his shell, and carries it home to place in the butter. If he does this it is believed that the supply of butter will not fail throughout the year.

This same service was observed by a writer in the *Survey*, in a church on East 27th Street, New York, rented by a company of Armenian folk residing in that city.⁷ The same symbolic "Washing of Feet" was carried out on the evening of Maundy Thursday in much the same fashion as it is carried out in the home-land. The symbolism, the pageantry, the color of oriental Armenian worship, the silver-mounted Bible on the altar in the center, the rising steps, the crosses, the lighted candles, and the incense were all there. A white-robed choir with green velvet copes filed in, singing long chants. The choir was followed by two priests, and the priests by the bishop with his mitre, robe of crimson and gold, and his ivory cross held in the right hand with a kerchief of crimson silk. A shining crozier held in his left hand marked his office as shepherd of the flock; a large jewel locket and cross hung from his breast and was probably the gift of the Czar. The choir chant that continues all the while was described as an intricate, rhythmless tune, now passionate, now wailing and altogether "oriental," accompanied by a few older folk here and there who were humming in unison with the choir and the leader, who was beating time. Beside the humming the congregation took no part in the service except that it stood up for the psalm and prayer. Suddenly a sound to the right brought the observer's attention to an old woman lying prostrate in the aisle. No one helped her, no one even seemed to notice her, but presently she rose to a kneeling posture and lifted her eyes in prayer to the altar. Again she prostrated herself, and again rose to lift her eyes to the altar, which performance was repeated a third time before the old woman

⁶ F. C. Conybeare, *Ritual Armenorum* pp. 213, 294.

⁷ *Survey* 36:167. Anonymous.

took her seat. "Der Voghormia" meaning "Lord have mercy upon us," was repeated ten times by the interceding bishop in a voice loud and intense, and a second ten times, and a third ten times. The chant quickened, and as the aged priest took the Bible from its place and held it toward the audience the bishop gave his benediction of peace to the "four corners of the earth." There was another chant after which the washing of the feet commenced. With deep seriousness the bishop placed his staff by the altar, laid aside his mitre and brocaded robes, and beginning with the aged priest, he knelt beside a bowl of water to wash his feet. Ten more of those who came forward shared in the ceremony. "I can not so serve you all," he said at the close of his address, "I am sorry. Take as symbolic what is done." There was a short intermission, but before ten o'clock the penitential service recommenced and continued until midnight. The story of Christ's betrayal in the garden was read, and the chants continued, wilder, sadder, and more wailing, accompanied by murmurs and occasionally by low cries from the people. As midnight approached the lights were dimmed one by one, and the emotion became more intense. As the hour struck, the congregation rose, and with clasped hands joined in a closing song and prayer. There were only a few score people present.

The prostration of the old woman reminds one of the spiritually wounded who lay prostrate over the floor during the times of the Kentucky revivals, but the fact is there is nothing hysterical in this particular phase of Armenian worship. The attitude is commonly practiced by Armenians, especially among the peasant classes. They lie flat touching their heads to the ground.⁸ But the posture is more peculiarly oriental than it is peculiarly Armenian. No sight is more common in the countries of Islam than the faithful Moslem who spreads his bit of carpet upon which he kneels with gaze fixed toward Mecca, prostrating himself repeatedly as he murmurs his prayers.

Although the picture given by Dubois of a simple church service he attended in Koulpe, Armenia, is not the ceremony of Maundy Thursday, it has one or two strokes of native color that make it impossible to omit.⁹ The church was poor and simple, the walls were built of stone cemented by clay or bad lime. Two rows of large beams neither squared nor trimmed supported the earthen roof in the manner of columns. At the farther end was a kind of niche, partitioned off by means of soiled curtains, thus forming a sanctuary where stood the priest, clothed in torn robe, to read the prayers. All of the little boys of the village encircled him, kneeling and chanting or reciting prayers, turn by turn. The eldest placed themselves outside of the choir and knelt on straw mats or on sheep's skins which

⁸ Tavernier, *Voyages* 1:496.

⁹ Dubois 3:441.

marked their customary places, and kissed the earth, or murmured very low the words of the priest, or responded to the chanting at high pitch. The women held themselves apart, their faces half veiled, filling the back of the church behind the men, and, with lowered heads, were the first to leave.

The kneeling posture and the prostration is again clearly in evidence, which together with what has been said is sufficient to show that this attitude, especially among the common people, is a very ordinary one and is therefore to be regarded merely as a very generally recognized posture of worship, and not at all significant necessarily of "conviction of sin" or a "feeling of penitence," which is nevertheless suggested. The church at Koulpe must have been a very poor one not to have benches, but it had its little chorus of boys, and the people participated in much the same way as in the little church in New York, although nearly a hundred years have passed since Dubois attended the simple service.

"Khatchahankist," meaning literally, "repose of the cross," is the second of the four church ceremonies I shall describe. The ceremony might better be named "the Blessing of the Water," for that is what it really consists of. In the towns of Turkey the churches devote one day each week to the performance of this rite, but in other churches it occurs at the end of a special mass, as for example on Ascension Day, or on the commemoration day of St. Gregory.¹⁰ There is always a very great gathering on this occasion largely because of the various superstitions connected with it. A large silver bowl of water is brought and placed on a stand at the foot of the altar, after which the officiating priest comes forward with relics of the Holy Cross, of the saints, or a simple silver cross in his hand. The more frequently used relics are those of St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. John the Baptist, St. James of Nisibis, or St. George the Martyr. The priest reads prayers over the water, which are answered by the chants from the choir, after which he dips the relic or the cross into the water three times, finally making the sign of the cross over the bowl. The Lord's prayer is repeated, after which a ladle is placed on one side of the vessel, while the priest kneels on the other, cross or relic in hand. Now the people crowd about, cross their faces and kiss the cross, and then take up the ladle to drink of the water thus blessed especially for drinking purposes. It is used also for ablutions, for popular belief endows the sacred liquid with curative power.

Some of the prayers that are repeated and the texts that are read during this ceremony are well worth noting, for they illustrate the candid interest of all participating. After the reading of the texts, the deacon repeats the following proclamation: "Let us pray unto God who loveth

¹⁰ Ormanian p. 177.

mankind and hath given for hope and refuge his victorious holy cross, which is armor invincible against the inworkings of Satan, to the end that whatsoever it touches, this water and all creatures, He shall through the same vouchsafe both healing and mercy." The priest then prays: "Bless, O Lord, this water, and hallow it with thy holy cross, in order that the flocks and sheep which may approach and drink of the same, may derive therefrom freedom from disease and sterility; for from them we select sacrifices of fragrant sweetness and offer them as victims to thyself." And again the priest prays: "Bless, O Lord, this water with the life-giving powers of the cross that everyone who shall drink thereof may derive therefrom a medicine of soul and body, and a health from the diseases which afflict him." Again: "Bless, O Lord, this water with thy holy cross, that it may impart to the fields where it is sprinkled profitable harvests, and that all plants and herbs may be more than ever increased in fruitfulness."¹¹ The cross is then passed three times over the water with the words, "Let this water be blessed and hallowed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." This is followed by a short proclamation by the deacon and a closing prayer by the priest, after which the assembled people receive of the magic water as above described.

This frank personal interest is characteristic of many of the church ceremonies. For example in the sacrament of holy communion, incense is offered with the prayer, "Do thou in its stead send upon us the graces and gifts of thine Holy Spirit."¹²

Of central importance to the nation as to the religion is the ceremony of the consecration of the Katholikos, the supreme authority of the church, which is held in front of the Cathedral at Etchmiadzin.¹³ People from near and far gather together to witness this event, and lest they should fail to see the central act of the ceremony, the roofs near-by are all used for the greater advantage they give to the observer. The banner of the Katholikos is set flying from the belfry tower; in front of the entrance to the Cathedral is set a wooden dais covered with carpets and costly embroideries whereon the ceremony is performed; the procession is formed and all is then in readiness. A service is held in the Cathedral, after which the procession issues from the church, and the various state and church

¹¹ F. C. Conybeare, *Ritual Armenorum* p. 224.

¹² Brightman, *Eastern Liturgies*, chapter on Armenian Liturgy. For an interesting variation of this ceremony see Tavernier 1:502.

Closely related to this ceremony is that of the blessing or purifying of a well. A well is not used until a priest has first blessed it, or if the water of a well becomes impure, it is necessary to purify it by the blessing of a priest. The latter takes a cross and a Bible and having requested the people to draw a pail of water which is thrown away, a second pail is drawn, over which the priest reads a psalm. The water is then blessed with the cross, incense is burned over the well, and the pail of water is emptied back. (Maschitz.)

¹³ Lynch 1:203, 204.

officials including representatives from the Russian government, the choir and deacons, all take their places about the platform. The twelve bishops who reside at Etchmiadzin, and whose business it is to wait upon the Katholikos, now appear gorgeously attired, escorting the central figure of the day, over whose head two attendants carry a richly embroidered canopy. The patriarch falls on his knees, his feet beneath his body in full accordance with the ordinary posture. One bishop now reads, after which another advances bearing in his hands the image of a dove wrought in gold. It is the receptacle of the holy oil, which is a mixture of the sacred oil blessed by St. Gregory, sparingly used and carefully preserved in the treasury of the Cathedral, and of the specially prepared oil consecrated in Sis in Cilicia. While one bishop is pouring the holy oil from the neck of the golden dove over the head of the patriarch, the other bishops gather around to spread the oil about with their thumbs, making at the same time the sign of the cross. A piece of cloth is now placed over his head, his face being covered at the same time by a veil which is attached to the cloth. After a brief interval the newly consecrated Katholikos, followed by the bishops, officials, and procession, re-enters the church in order to complete the ceremony. When the procession again files out escorting the pontiff to his residence, the choir sings, and the Russian band plays. Festivities continue throughout the day and into the night, including mainly the banquet with its toasts and songs by the choir, and the concert furnished by the band in the evening. The band is a foreign innovation, although the particular band observed by Lynch consisted mostly of Armenians.

The holy oil used in the consecration consists for the most part of the preparation manufactured in Sis, as stated, and with which there is a special ceremony connected, which is of general importance, for the oil is also used for the various necessary consecrations of all the churches. In the church at Sis is treasured a gorgeous silver bowl, decorated with turrets and pinnacles, in which "Muron" as it is called, or holy oil is made every four years. Pilgrims come from far to witness the event. The bowl, which holds about a gallon of oil is placed outside the church, and in it are placed a hundred and one kinds of flowers amid prayers and chants.¹⁴ These flowers are stirred with the arm of St. Gregory, after which the lid is put on and the mixture made to boil.¹⁵ The privilege of lifting off the lid is auctioned, and it is said that £100 was once paid for the distinction. The oil is then sold to the pilgrims, all of whom take a phial of it along to their homes where it is used in baptism, marriage, and burial ceremonies. It is also believed to have wonderful medicinal properties.

¹⁴ *Contemporary Review* 70:695. J. T. Bent.
Tavernier, 1:500, 501.

¹⁵ The people believe that the holy relic causes the mixture to boil.

The chief social value of these ceremonies lies in the fact that they bring large groups of people together under unusual circumstances, all of which adds importance to the various rites and festivities of the occasion. Especially is this true of the consecration of the Katholikos, which may occur twice or at the most three times in a generation. For this reason and also because of the authority and position of the Katholikos, not only as head of the church, but also in a very real sense, as head of the nation, this ceremony is attended by many pilgrims from the various sections of the country. Having assembled, the occasion is thus made a great deal more of than if it were an ordinary event. The day is a festival day in the full meaning of the term. Besides the services there is the banquet, the special choir, and the band. The relics kept in the treasury, which it is probable that most people who come have not seen before; also the holy churches of St. Gaiane and St. Rhipsime, which are visited by small groups throughout the day; and most of all the sacred altar of the Cathedral, where Christ descended in the vision of St. Gregory, are special attractions. And then there is the library where many ancient and precious manuscripts are exhibited, the institution of the monastery, the garden of the Katholikos, the printing press, and the seminary, all of which are of interest to the spectator. In fact there is sufficient to induce the pilgrims to remain for a number of days, which many of them do. The grounds are provided with a pilgrim's court surrounded by guest chambers utilized at this time. Naturally enough the various monuments suggest the traditions and legends with which they are connected, such as the traditions of St. Gregory, Tiridates, the legends of St. Rhipsime and St. Gaiane, and the other legends associated with the introduction of Christianity. Although centered about a religious ceremony which probably lasts no longer than fifteen minutes, the occasion is thus made a festival, and is about as important in fostering a real sentiment of patriotism and of church loyalty as any other single festival.

The ceremony of the manufacture of the holy oil is not of such central importance. It also, however, has the advantage of not occurring very frequently, coming as it does only once in every four years. This together with the general utility of the oil in all of the various church ceremonies, plus the superstitions connected with it, is sufficient to induce pilgrims to make the journey to Sis in Cilicia, where the ceremony is held. It is again this assembly of pilgrims that gives the ceremony a social importance. In a nation like the United States where all parts are connected by railroads, telegraphs, and telephones, such a pilgrimage would have comparatively little social value. Except for government centers, there are no telegraphs in Armenia, the telephone is known only in a few cities, and railroads there are none. This lack of communication gives such ceremonies to which pilgrimages are made a very special social value which

they otherwise would not at all have. The electoral assemblies spoken of have the same value, and for the same reason. The Armenian is not a person to be silent, and talks even when prudence is the better part of valour. He criticizes, condemns, and praises openly, fearlessly, and carelessly, and such a gathering of pilgrims, or electors, if it means anything, would mean a wholesale exchange of facts relating to current events, opinions, and rumors with reference to politics, religion, and every phase of social and industrial life.

The Blessing of the Water can not be said to have so great a social value, occurring as it does in some parts of the country once every week. And yet this service is unusually well attended, largely because of the superstitions connected with the blessed water. Religion here appears to offer its biggest attraction to the less fortunate, such as the rheumatic, the tubercular, the dyspeptic, the epileptic, and the feeble-minded. But enough facts have been mentioned to show that the Armenian church is something more than an institution of cure and relief. It has identified itself too completely with the common life by keeping alive the streams and cross currents of social activity to admit of such a supposition.

The ceremony of Maundy Thursday, or Washing of the Feet, is, of the four I have mentioned, of the least social importance. But it is generally attended, especially by the women who are compelled by the ban of custom to complete their house-cleaning before this service begins. And then too, it is the commencement of the Easter celebration, and as such has a distinct festival value. I have reviewed them therefore in the order of their social importance. The consecration of the Katholikos first; second the making of holy oil; third, the Blessing of the Water, and finally, the Washing of the Feet, which complete the second group of festivals.

CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE FESTIVAL OCCASIONS

SECTION 1. BAPTISM

The third group of festivals comprises those connected with the common life of the people, including the ceremonies of baptism, betrothal, marriage, and funeral. The church is vitally related to each of them, and they are of importance here because of their social value, which I shall again endeavor to point out.

First after birth, the most important event in the life of every Armenian child is that of baptism, for the belief is that the unbaptized child has no soul. The infant is therefore generally baptized on the day after birth, and when this is impossible always within eight days of birth. If the child is sick there is all the more reason to hurry; in this case the essential parts of the ceremony are performed in the home, the remainder being celebrated at the church at some later time. The very first thing to be done therefore after the birth of a child is to make the necessary preparations for baptism, which are very elaborate in the case of the first-born, especially if the child is a boy.¹ A girl is always better than no child at all, but not much better. A godfather and godmother are selected, presents are exchanged between them and the parents of the child, invitations are sent to friends and relations, and at a fixed time the assembled people form a procession to the church, led by the midwife holding the child. The godfather pays all expenses, and therefore such splendor as the ceremony may have in the way of special ornaments for the altar, numbers of priests, and a large choir, is determined by him. After the group has properly assembled at the church, the priest takes the child from the midwife and gives it to the godfather. The profession of faith follows immediately and then the priest turns to the west to abjure the devil and to the east to invoke the Trinity.² Having placed the hem of his chasuble upon the babe, the priest proceeds to the sacristy reciting a psalm, and followed by the people. The central event now takes place. The baptism consists of three immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity. First water is poured over the head of the child, after which the whole body is plunged into the water. Confirmation is administered right after the ceremony of immersion, and takes place upon the altar of the church proper, before the image of the Blessed Virgin. The forehead, eyes, ears,

¹ *Catholic World* 11:301. Paul Terzian.

² According to *Maschtoz* the devil is abjured and the Trinity invoked at the gate of the church. In the course of the ceremony the priest unclothes the babe and asks the godfather, "What seeks the child?" The godfather answers, "Faith, Hope, Love, and Baptism, to be cleansed from his sins and to be freed from the devils." The three immersions are symbolical of the three days of burial of Christ. (*Maschtoz*.)

nose, mouth, hands, back, breast and upper part of the feet of the infant are anointed with holy oil, and two wax tapers are placed in the hands of the godfather while carrying the child. The priest then takes the tapers and the babe, consecrates and confirms him by three profound inclinations before the altar, gives candles and child back to the godfather and blesses both. Now the child may be called by its Christian name, which is usually that of a saint.³ Led by the priest and the singing choir, the procession now starts back to the home of the little one, still carried by the godfather who continues to hold the candles. When he reaches the door of the mother, she kneels and prostrates herself before him. He in turn delivers the child to the mother's arms who may now kiss it for the first time, the child not having been kissed by any one from the moment of birth to the delivering over to the mother by the godfather after baptism. Others may now also kiss the babe, and each endeavors to be the first, for there is a superstitious value attached to the first kiss following the mother's after baptism. The priests and the family of the godfather spend the evening in the child's home. They are served constantly by the father who does not himself sit down. For forty days the mother must keep her room, and walk only in such parts of the house as are exposed to the sun.⁴ Having completed the fortieth day she and her babe are taken to church by the grandmother.⁵ On this occasion the young mother must bring an offering, which in times past was a rich Persian rug, but is now merely a package of tapers. She waits at the door of the sacristy until the priest comes and leads her in before the high altar where both mother and child receive a blessing. After this ceremony she must visit the godfather and kiss his hand in token of gratitude.

If a funeral passes during the first forty days of the child's life, the little one must be snatched up from the cradle and be carried upright. People now come to offer their felicitations. The greeting of the guest is always, "May God raise the child in the shadow of its parents," to which answer is given, "May God bless you according to your desire," or "May your tongue be always in good health."

SECTION 2. BETROTHAL

It is the popular belief among Armenians that the practice of early marriages dates from the proclamation of a Persian shah of the sixteenth century, to whom part of Armenia was tributary.⁶ This edict was intended

³ In the description of baptism as witnessed by Tavernier, red and white threads were laid about the neck of the child at this point in the ceremony. They represent the blood and body of Christ and are probably believed to keep away the evil eye. Beads and various other charm tokens are commonly used for this purpose. (Tavernier 1:500.)

⁴ This is probably because evil spirits dwell in darkness, while the beneficent are light.

⁵ The similarity to the old Hebrew custom may be noted.

⁶ Paul Terzian, *Catholic World* 71:305.

to wipe out Christianity, and provided for the marriage of Armenian boys and girls with Persian children. In order to evade the edict, the Armenian parents ran secretly from house to house for several nights marrying off their children to each other. The custom on the part of the parents of arranging for the marriage of their children without the knowledge of the latter is supposed also to be rooted in this event. Whether the explanation be true or not, it certainly is not uncommon for children to marry at sixteen in the interior of Armenia, and it is still generally true that arrangements for the marriages of children are made without the knowledge of those most concerned.⁷ The girl does occasionally exercise choice, but when the unfortunate suitor is not desired by the parents the feeling of obligation on the girl's part, simply because she has lived at her father's table, is sufficient to induce her to submit.⁸ And the same may be said of the young man, although the greater independence of a son gives him a little more ground for acting contrary to his father's wishes, than in the case of the daughter. But even when the choice of the children is accepted, the arrangements and ceremony of betrothal are always carried out by the parents.

These arrangements are something as follows. The parents of a young man consult his grandparents, and choose a young girl who to them seems eligible. They then inform a woman match-maker of their decision, and it is her business to sound the ground, so to speak, before a proposal is made, since a refusal would ruin the boy's reputation. The matchmaker is often a professional woman, and can therefore be relied upon not to make a bungle of the job. Among other things, she finds out what gifts the bridegroom-to-be must make to his future bride, which can of course be done only after the proposal has met with a favorable response on the part of the parents of the girl. "What can he offer his bride," is the all important question from the standpoint of the girl's family. Among the rich, but in times past, gold bracelets bejeweled with diamonds or strings of gold pieces for adorning the head or neck were common varieties of gifts. To-day silver plate, or expensive heirlooms are given. After these matters have been decided upon, preparations are made for the ceremony of betrothal, usually held in the evening. The friends of the young man are notified to meet together in his house at an appointed hour with the priest who is given a ring which he blesses. The procession of the bridegroom's friends headed by the priest now starts for the house of the bride.

⁷ Tavernier says that frequently two pregnant women who are on very friendly terms, will engage their future offspring, trusting to fortune that one will be a boy and the other a girl. (Tavernier 1:505.)

⁸ In fact when there is a variance of choice between parents and daughter it is common for the girl to regard the decision of her parents as being her fate. "Wenn eine junge Frau mit ihrer Heirat, die sie, nach dem Willen der Eltern geschlossen hat, unzufrieden ist, so singt sie:

'Was soll ich meinem Vater und meiner Mutter sagen?

Das war auf meine Stirn geschrieben.'" (Abeghian p. 54.)

All are provided with lighted wax candles which they hold in their hands as they proceed down the streets accompanied by the sound of violin, clarinets, drum, and joyful singing. Sometimes a detour is made in order to lengthen the procession.

Having arrived at their destination, the father and mother of the girl pretend to know nothing whatever of the reason for the coming of the guests, and conversation proceeds for a considerable time without the slightest allusion to the matter of chief moment. The priest finally makes the following statement amid profound silence: "According to the law of the supreme Creator, and following the usages of human society, we have the happiness of demanding the hand of Miss X, for Mr. Y." The father of the girl pretends not to wish to accept, stating that she is too young, or that her mother is very desirous to keep her at home. But upon further pressing on the part of the parents of the boy, the acceptance is given. It is now the turn of the girl to be consulted; she, however, is nowhere to be found. The priest searches, and when finally discovered she does not speak a word. The former, however, knows, and offering his hand he says, "If you consent, kiss the hand," which is straightway done, for the girl has been informed beforehand that the kiss is to be forthcoming. This part of the procedure takes place apart from the crowd, and is followed by the presentation of the ring and the benediction which must take place before the public. But since custom forbids the girl to appear during the entire evening, a brother or a sister comes forward and kneels before the priest to receive the ring. The rest all kneel at the same time, and the priest gives the benediction. The ring is carried by the child to the fiancée, the health of the couple is drunk in rose-syrup, and congratulations and compliments are exchanged. Whatever else is eaten or drunk, rose-syrup must be at hand, for this is essential and peculiar to the ceremony.

All this while the young man is within the walls of his own home. Custom forbids him to appear at the house of his bride-to-be until the wedding day, and if perchance the two should meet, he must turn his head away while she hides herself. Towards ten o'clock the party breaks up, and each guest is given a wax candle. All try to steal something from the house before leaving, such as a bottle, a glass, or a spoon, and if the thieves are not caught before they leave the house, the articles are returned only at the price of a supper from the head of the family. The party now returns to the home of the future bridegroom, accompanied by the friends and relatives of the girl. The procession formed, there is the same lighting of wax candles received from the host, brightening the otherwise darkened streets, and the same music and singing to triumph over the silence of the night. The young man must stand upright before his future father-in-law all through the visit. For him the great moment comes when the

brother of his fiancée takes him aside and offers him a glass of syrup prepared by her own hands. The whole night is passed in song and amusement. During the following fortnight both families receive visits of congratulation, and at every visit the host or hostess must offer the syrup drunk at the betrothal ceremony.

SECTION 3. MARRIAGE

Elaborate and gay as are the festivities of betrothal, the celebrations of marriage are so much more so that one is inclined to look upon the essential religious ceremony as a pretext for the merry-making.⁹ The interval of a month which ordinarily intervenes between engagement and marriage is devoted to making the necessary preparations for the wedding. The bridegroom must get ready the promised ornaments, a white wedding-dress for his bride, a fine veil to cover her face, and a pair of shoes, a rather strange combination of gifts. One wonders also why the necessary gloves and silk stockings are not included. The young lady on her part prepares her trousseau including garments of various sorts, bits of jewelry, a wooden chest filled with her clothing, a mirror, a nuptial bed with the necessary accessories, and a few cooking utensils; altogether an outfit quite as varied and singular as the gifts of the bridegroom, but certainly practical and sensible enough. Two days before the wedding, which usually occurs on a Sunday afternoon, invitations are sent out to friends and relatives, and musicians are secured. On the eve of the ceremony, the godfather invites the bridegroom with his friends to a Turkish bath, where they go to the accompaniment of music and singing. This part of the celebration is full of laughter and song, and is continued on the forenoon of the next day in the home of the bridegroom, when the barber comes to shave him in the presence of the guests and musicians, who sing and play as on the preceding evening at the bath. The occasion is one of importance for the barber, who brings all sorts of perfumes which are purchased by the guests and poured over the bridegroom; he receives not only a large fee for his service but also a double price for the scented extracts. The young man is then dressed up while the priest and choir children who have arrived sing canticles.

In the meantime very similar festivities occur in the home of the bride, participated in by her young girl friends and relatives, except that they are not characterized by the same spirit of loud laughter and rejoicing. On the eve of the wedding the girls gather around her to sing melancholy songs, in considerable contrast with the gay, spirited music and singing taking place in the Turkish bath at the same time. Having shared the sadness, they place a rose leaf on the palm of each hand of the

⁹ Paul Terzian, *Catholic World* 71:305.

bride, which is covered with henneh, a green Persian powder made into paste, after which each hand is carefully bandaged up. So the poor sad girl must go to bed, to sleep if she can. On the next morning her friends again arrive to take the bandages off her hands, to dress her, and to sing and dance about her. Except for the print of the rose leaf, the henneh leaves the hands orange red, which is supposed to be beautiful. The songs and dancing are again of a decidedly melancholy tone. Her white dress, together with the coat of the bridegroom, must be blessed by the priest, a ceremony which the church functionary performs alone, both articles being sent to him early in the morning. Preliminary to the day's events, and before breakfast, both bride and bridegroom, being previously confessed, go separately to church, where they take communion. This done, the festivities described follow, bride and bridegroom are dressed, and all is in readiness for the ceremony which occurs in the late afternoon or evening.

The bride must ride to church on horseback, and having arrived she is dismounted, and later remounted without touching her feet to the ground, which rather cumbersome performance is accomplished through the help of a brother or relative, who also rides the bride's steed while the ceremony takes place within, for the horse is not to be left riderless. The procession to the church is accompanied by musicians. Before the rail which separates the choir from the body of the church, two wooden chairs are placed, upon which the couple sit down while the people present kneel on the mats covering the floor. When the time comes for the blessing of the priest, the couple arise, step inside the choir space, and stand facing each other between the high altar and two witnesses, their foreheads touching. In this position they receive the sacrament of matrimony, answering in the affirmative the questions of the priest regarding their duties to each other and to their children. Of the bride is demanded perfect faithfulness to conjugal duties, entire obedience to the husband of whom care, patience, wisdom, and love are required. The priest, taking the right hand of the bride and placing it in the hand of the bridegroom, says, "According to the divine order God gave to our ancestors, I give thee now this wife in subjection. Wilt thou be her master?" "Through the help of God I will," answers the bridegroom. The priest then asks the woman, "Wilt thou be obedient to him?" to which is answered, "I am obedient according to the order of God." These questions are repeated and replied to thrice, in evident implicit belief that once would not be sufficient. Finally, the priest ties to each of their heads a cord and cross, which is again removed by him late at night in the home with special ceremony, and it is only after this performance that the couple may enter the nuptial chamber.

After the ceremony at the church the procession starts back for the home of the bridegroom's father, the bride riding upon her horse, musician

playing, and choir boys singing. The water-carriers, who have supplied drinking water, break their jars noisily before the bridegroom, drenching his marriage costume and giving rather an abrupt signal to the godfather whose business it is to tip them. Noisily the procession moves along the streets until it arrives at the gate of the house. In days past it was the custom at this point in the ceremony to place a sheep ready to be sacrificed at the feet of the young couple, the poorer people contenting themselves with chickens. The butcher put his knife to the neck of the sheep saying, "May God thus put all your enemies under your feet, Amen, Amen." Then pieces of coin mixed with raisins, pistachios, and other bits of nuts or dried fruits are showered over the people from the windows above, while the godfather leads the bridegroom within to the crowd of men, and the godmother leads the bride to the women, everybody trying to kiss the cross on their heads. The bride is then placed in the seat of honor and in her arms is laid first a little boy, and then a little girl, so that the first child may be a boy and if perchance the will of God be otherwise at least a girl. Each guest now comes to the bride to place at her feet a fruit in season. The bridegroom is called "the prince of the feast" and must never quit his seat of honor. If he does leave his chair he must place an object belonging to him upon his seat, and if he should at any time omit to do so, the assembly makes the godfather pay the necessary forfeit, which is usually a dinner. Towards nine, the guests take their leave, having eaten and sung to their uttermost desire.¹⁰

Living in the home of her patriarchal father-in-law, the young wife is subject to the severest restraints. She must wear a lightly fitting veil enclosing her face below the eyes, without which she can not appear even in the house.¹¹ She wears a close fitting bodice fastened at the neck with silver clasps, full trousers of rose colored silk gathered in at the ankles by a filet of silver; her feet are bare, a silver girdle of curious workmanship loosely encircles her waist, and a long padded garment, open down the front, hangs from her shoulders. Not a single word must she utter to any member of the household, except when alone with her husband, and then only such as may be absolutely necessary, until she has given birth to her first child. Then she may speak to her nursling, after a while to her mother-in-law, later to her own mother, and by and by to the young girls of the household, but never in all her life may she have word with a young man not a relative. During her first year of married life, she may not go out of the house except for two visits to the church. Every morning and at

¹⁰ It is very evident that the expense of these festivities is a considerable item in the budget of the bridegroom's father. But it is a matter of social pride and respectability to live up to a certain standard of established usage. Accordingly many families involve themselves in life-long incumbrances, not only in the betrothal and marriage festivities but also in the ceremony of baptism, simply to come up to a recognized norm of expenditure. (Tavernier 1:504, 505.)

¹¹ Cesaresco, chapter on Armenian folk-songs.

the end of each meal she must pour water over the hands of her father- and mother-in-law, and for a certain time after marriage, when visitors come, she must kiss their hands, except of course, for men, before whom she may not even appear.¹² Apart from these troublesome restraints the young wife is treated with the utmost solicitude, and in some parts, even the peasant wife is not allowed to do outdoor work. In the mountain villages of Persian Armenia, however, the women do all the tilling in the fields, wearing their veils over their mouths as they work.¹³ The author here quoted states that husbands never see the mouths of their wives, who not only must not speak during the first year of married life, or until a child is born, but also may not converse freely with their husbands until six years of married life have elapsed.¹⁴

In such fashion the sanctity of the marriage relation is strictly guarded, and as one would suppose, illegitimate births are unknown in Armenia. Intermarriage among relations is forbidden, and until recent years, divorce has been unknown.¹⁵ As for the taboo on speech, it is calculated not so much as an inducement to the production of offspring as to preserve harmonious relations between the various members of the patriarchal household. Even the patriarch with all his authority would find difficulty in preserving proper decorum of speech and manners in so heterogeneous a household, if every newly acquired daughter-in-law were given a free rein in the use of her tongue. As the neophyte is made to understand his position by a brutal initiation, so the young wife is kept from assuming command over the female household by the placing of a moral valuation upon the silence which alone is compatible with the essential modesty regarded as the first and chief of virtues among wives. In the household of the patriarch there is a great deal to be done in common, and unfortunately the occasion for mutual aid is not sufficient to bring about the desired coöperation. Hence singleness of command and authority is a necessary condition, not only of efficiency, but also of peace, for it can not be supposed that so many daughters-in-law would work together in harmony. It would be a mistake, therefore, to regard the customary silence as an inducement to child-bearing.

Identifying itself with the common events of life, such as birth, marriage, and death, the church has not only given a religious meaning to these occasions but has also sanctioned and even encouraged the festivities that accompany them. These festivities have up to this point been

¹² Paul Terzian, *Catholic World* 71:508.

¹³ Bent, *Contemporary Review* 70:701.

¹⁴ Tavernier states that in Persian Armenia a man frequently lives with his wife ten years without ever hearing her voice or seeing her face. Of course she does not sleep with her veil over her face, but she is always careful to blow out the candle before she removes the veil, as she is to rise before daybreak in order to put it on again. (Tavernier 1:507.)

¹⁵ Trowbridge, *New Englander* 33:1 ff.

occasions for rejoicing, with the single and significant exception of the melancholy singing of the bride's friends on the eve and day of her wedding. There is a perfect naturalness about all the merry-making and festivals so far considered, and this is no less characteristic of the funeral celebrations now to be taken up. The description of these will conclude my treatment of the last group of festivals, which are more properly festival-ceremonies, or ceremonies that have been made the occasion of festivity.

SECTION 4. FUNERAL

The funerals, as one would naturally suppose, are more ceremonious, more ritualistic, and although there is now generally a minimum of festivity connected with them, this has not always been so.¹⁶ When the condition of a sick person is beyond hope, the priest is notified and the person is given confession, communion, and extreme unction. After death the eyes and mouth are closed, the body washed and dressed up in the newest and cleanest clothes to be had, and the arms crossed on the breast.¹⁷ Two candles are kept burning until the day of the funeral, one at the foot and one at the head of the coffin. Sad, wooden bells are sounded, and guests are invited to pay their last respects. Coffee is served to them, but without sugar, as a sign of grief. Mourning women are secured, who eulogize the departed and weep and lament until the priests begin their chanting. The corpse is now taken to the church in a special coffin which is covered with a black velvet cloth adorned with small white crosses, among the wealthy, but among the poor the body is wrapped in linen and laid in a simple bier, carried by relatives and friends. At the head of the procession, which marches very slowly and chants on the way, there are carried a great cross and two lighted torches, followed by the priests and then by the coffin. The passer-by must stop and cross himself many times. At the church the coffin is laid down, and if the relatives are wealthy each person in the church is provided with a small wax candle which is kept lighted during the service. While the ceremony proceeds the body is blessed with holy water and perfumed with incense, after which the procession re-forms to accompany the body to the cemetery. The chanting is kept up all the way. At the cemetery the body is lowered into its last resting-place, and the priest, after making the sign of the cross on the four corners of the grave, throws three shovelfuls of earth into it and three more on the coffin. The people imitate by throwing three handfuls of dust, and the ceremony completed, all return to the home of the deceased where they

¹⁶ Paul Terzian, *Catholic World* 71:509.

¹⁷ This statement is in contradiction to a previous statement that the body of the dead is merely wrapped in white cloth after it has been washed; (see page 60) the use of the white cloth is common among Gregorian Armenians.

partake of steaming broth prepared by the neighbors and friends, and recite prayers for the soul of the dead. This latter practice, as said before, is a pagan survival, as is also the chanting of mass for the departed, which occurs three days later, at which time broth is again distributed, but this time to the poor as a sacrifice to the dead. The grave is blessed on the third day, again on the ninth, at the close of the third month, and for the last time, at the close of the year.

The funeral of a priest is performed with much splendor.¹⁸ The procession makes a circuit of all the churches, and stopping at different places, portions of the gospel are read. If the priest be of high rank, as an archbishop, or a bishop, he is carried in an open coffin and in a sitting posture, dressed up in official vestments, in which position he is interred in the courtyard of the church. Farmers send sheep to be killed and given to the poor as a sacrifice. The Greeks in Constantinople also carry their dead in an open coffin, but this is because a Greek official who was a refugee prisoner in Constantinople at the time of the war of the Turks with the Greeks, endeavored to get himself carried out of the country by feigning death and boxing himself up in a coffin. But the Turks discovered the ruse and it was enacted by the sultan that thereafter all Greeks must be carried to their graves in open coffins. The custom in respect to the Armenian bishops, however, has no connection with this.

In some parts of Armenia, as for example in Erzerum, the snow lies so deep in winter-time that burial is well-nigh impossible. During spring-time, with the melting of the snow, coffins have been found perched up on tree tops. This was related by an Armenian boy I know of, who lived in the vicinity of Erzerum. Curious customs of the past have left their marks. In Tarsus, for example, there are Armenian graves ranged about a tree which is asserted to have been planted by St. Paul, each provided with a stone upon which has been carved a symbol of the deceased, for the merchant, a representation of weights and measures, for the blacksmith, an anvil and hammer, for the scribe, an inkstand and pen, and for the industrious housewife, a distaff and spindle. In the cemetery of Nakhitchevan is a large building in which the mourners have a great repast after the funeral, and in certain other graveyards, Dubois found innumerable pieces of broken pitchers and crockery, which were probably broken, as the custom is, to ward off the evil spirit of the dead.

These four ceremonies complete the third and last group of festivals described. I have called them ceremonies because fundamentally that is what they are, but they are to be distinguished sharply from the many church ceremonies I have not so much as mentioned, by reason

¹⁸ Paul Terzian, *Catholic World* 71:509 ff.

of their festival or social value which alone makes them proper subject-matter for this thesis. The relation between these ceremonies as revealed in the common procession, as well as in the religious ceremony necessary to each is due largely to the fact that they have to do with the most ordinary, and yet most extraordinary of life's events, birth, betrothal, marriage, and death.

Reviewing them from the standpoint of their social or festival value, it is obvious that the marriage celebration easily takes first place, the betrothal festivities second, baptism and funeral third. There is the rather uncouth, perhaps, but none the less spontaneous gaiety of the friends of the bridegroom, not only on the eve of the wedding-day when they go to the bath, but also on the morning of the wedding-day when the unfortunate youth is assuredly cured of any addiction he might have to the use of perfumes. I should imagine that the music would begin to bore the young men by the time the barber arrives, since the musicians also accompany the rejoicing of the night before, and yet it may be said that there could be nothing more convenient or ingenious devised to carry over a lull in the merry-making, for after all, the young men could not well be singing, joking, laughing, and teasing all the time. In striking contrast is the melancholy rejoicing of the party of young women at the home of the bride. But where there is dancing and singing there can not well be weeping, although no doubt it is more natural for the bride to be thoughtful on her wedding-day, than for the bridegroom, for it is the former who leaves her home to spend the rest of her days in a very new, very strange, perhaps even unkindly world. There is still another reason for the melancholy, in that the girl must know she is bidding farewell forever to the delights and joys and freedom of childhood, for although to-day she may speak and sing and make merry, to-morrow morning she must be silent and prepared to pour water over the hands of her father- and mother-in-law. Henceforth it is for her to be submissive, obedient, docile, uncomplaining even at heart, for what use will it be to complain, and though her most cherished dreams may be of motherhood, does she not also have spirit, and why must it be broken? Is she then only a chattel to be sold into everlasting bondage? It is all too evident, even to the dullest of brides, that the happiness of childhood is forever past, and the brighter one can hardly fail to feel that she has been bartered for the bit of gold about her waist or neck.

There is then the very highest of social value to be attributed to both of these festivities, and largely because in each group of people, the young men on one side, the young women on the other, there is perfect community of feeling, mutual understanding, and freedom of thought and expression. In comparison with these gatherings, the mixed assembly at the house of the bridegroom after the marriage ceremony is of little importance.

The succession of events covering a period of nearly thirty-six hours, of which only a few, and perhaps none at all, are spent in sleep by the members of the bridal party, must certainly begin to have its effect by the time the little baby doll is placed in the lap of the bride.

The betrothal party is always out for a good time, for they realize that the merry-making is to be an all-night affair. There is the procession with its candles lighting up the darkened streets, the music and singing filling all space, the humorous little artificialities in the house of the bride,—real enough, at least ceremoniously, from the standpoint of the family,—the syrup, the attempted stealing of utensils, the return procession, the singing, music, and dancing at the home of the young bridegroom-to-be, without stop until dawn. All of this makes a rather complete occasion, even for young people.

Baptism and funeral rites come nearest being pure ceremonies. But even the baptismal rite has its procession to and from the church participated in by all the friends and relatives of the family, and though the event is an occasion neither for rejoicing nor for sorrow, it is important enough, occurring as it does but once in the lifetime of each individual. There are, to be sure, the social calls that follow the ceremony. But the event can not be said to have any attraction for the young; and if this is true of baptism, it is still more true of funerals. Nevertheless there is the distinct psychological value of each, calling up as they do various associations, as the baptism of this one, or the death of another one, and thus keeping alive the deepest experiences of life. If they are crude and offensive to more delicate tastes, it must be remembered that a belief is represented in the concrete fashion essential to the simple mind, a mode of representation necessary to the best of intellects even though on another plane.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Such are the festivals treated in the second and last part of this thesis. Is it true that they form a vehicle of expression for the national sentiment created by the large mass of social material of which the legends of Part One are a considerable and important portion? Again it will be necessary to remind ourselves of the chief sentiments included within Armenian national sentiment, i.e., the sentiment of loyalty to the church, the sentiment of reverence amounting almost to worship for the ancient glory of the nation, and the sentiment of love for the country. It would be ridiculous to suppose that every festival was designed to give expression to some one of these sentiments. But that these sentiments are given very clear, very real outward expression in the great majority of the celebrations described, should be so evident at this point as to make further exposition unnecessary. In the summer Festival of Vartavar, the spring Festival of Mihr, Vartan's Day, and in the consecration of the Katholikos there is the proud and reverent looking back to the times when Armenia was an independent nation; the festival ceremonies of the third group, baptism, betrothal, marriage, and funeral, though they are not positive expressions of the sentiments of loyalty to the church, are yet so completely interwoven with the church and dependent upon it that one is compelled to regard the feeling as something to be taken for granted, while in most of the festivals of the second group, Christmas, Easter, Maundy Thursday, and the Blessing of the Grapes especially, the sentiment is given a more positive expression. As for the sentiment of love for the country, that is identified especially with Vartavar and Vartan's Day. It is evident, therefore, that each of these festivals and festival-ceremonies forms a medium more or less evident as the case may be, for the expression of one or more or all of the sentiments that make up Armenian national sentiment. Some of them are not to be classified as readily as this, as for example, the festival of Ascension morning, or Fortune-Telling Day, in which the dominant sentiment is one of romantic love, or in the Blessing of the Water, where the desire for a gain in health or wealth is the main psychological fact.

Each one of these festivals, however, is a great deal more than the putting into activity of some of the above sentiments. In many of them the play-instinct is clearly evident, while in a few such as Vartavar, the whole self, with all its sentiments, instincts, tendencies, and emotions, is given the fullest and most unrestrained freedom. A festival, if it is anything, is a letting loose of the reins; there is nothing to hinder, nothing

to keep back, nothing to hide, nothing to fear, and the self reaches out in a higher consciousness of fullness and completeness of living. As such it would be the greatest of fallacies to suppose any one of the festivals to be restricted to a particular sentiment. Nevertheless, it is clear, that the festivals do constitute vehicles of expression for the sentiments that make up Armenian national sentiment.

CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusions to which this study unmistakably gives rise are in respect to the national traits of the Armenian people. These traits have been brought out both explicitly and implicitly in connection with the various legends and festivals considered, and it is my purpose, therefore, to summarize and substantiate them at this point. They include, first, the superstitiousness, second, the conservatism, third, the self-sufficiency, and lastly the familism of the people.

First of these qualities, superstitiousness, may be ascribed in large measure to geographical isolation. The country to be sure, is so situated as to form a highway from Europe to the Mesopotamian valley, and from Asiatic Russia to the Mediterranean, and although it has been overrun by Assyrians, Greeks, Parthians, Romans, Persians, Turks, Egyptians, and still others, yet we must speak of it as isolated, for the science that has brought remote countries into contact has not affected Armenia to any considerable degree. Subject to a backward nation, lacking all modern means of communication, the country is shut off and the plows of civilization have not yet furrowed the social soil of superstition. How general these superstitions are is brought out especially by the festivals described, many of which have given rise to a superstition or a group of superstitions. From Vartavar, there came the belief that the dust from the sacred altar served as a talisman for children learning their A B C's; the spring fire festival gave rise to the practice of taking home a glowing brand for good luck; there is the belief that the blessed water will cure various diseases, and that the oil scraped from the anointed foot with a walnut given by the priest after washing the feet at the ceremony of Maundy Thursday, will keep a supply of butter throughout the year. And then there are the beliefs in the miraculous power of the holy oil, manufactured with due ceremony every four years at Sis; in the healing power of the various sacred relics kept at Etchmiadzin and other places, and ten thousand others. There are also beliefs not of a religious character as the above, such as the one in regard to the tetagush, the little locust-eating bird, which is supposed to be attracted by Ararat spring water. The same superstition obtains in other parts of the country with the difference that the inconvenience of obtaining Ararat spring water makes it necessary for the people to believe in the peculiar efficacy of other springs. These

illustrations are sufficient, and although it could hardly be proved that Armenians are more innately superstitious than the Anglo-Saxon ancestors who believed only a few generations ago in the power of the malignant eye, and that an innocent person might pass through fire unharmed, yet their superstitious nature and beliefs are present-day facts explained most completely on the ground of comparative isolation from the rest of the world.

Second of the national characteristics of the people clearly brought out by this study is their conservatism. This may also be traced in large measure to their secluded condition, but in larger proportion is it due to the solidarity and national consciousness, which naturally consider innovations as foreign, and intrusions of foreign cultures, ideals, customs, and manners as hostile. That this is true is indicated conclusively by the fact that in Constantinople, where Armenian culture has naturally come in conflict with that of the Greek, the Turk, and the European, the Armenians have not at all given up their ways to imitate any of the three peoples mentioned. To be sure they have not adhered rigidly to the old beliefs and practices of the interior. Comparison has resulted in substitution, and conflict between the rational and irrational, the *utile* and the *inutile*, has meant displacement, but invariably by something distinctly different from the usages and practices current among Turk or European. That is, Armenians are themselves centers of imitation by fellow Armenians who, though they follow the lines suggested by their fellow countrymen, scorn to imitate even the European, whose superiority is generally recognized in Constantinople. The Armenian, recognizing no superior, has merely modified his own practices, usages, manners, and customs to suit his changed environment. And therefore I say that the characteristic Armenian conservatism is due rather to a strong feeling of nationality than to isolation.

The conservatism of the church has been an important element. Refusing to have anything to do with the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, the church became independent and has maintained a policy of the most rigid ultra-conservatism ever since. Says Ormanian:

The Armenian church would have nothing to do with this transaction (Chalcedon) which was prompted by a design that had no bearing on theology. She remained firm in her original resolve, and ever maintained an attitude of ultra-conservatism. She set herself to resist every new dogmatic utterance said to emanate from revelation, as well as every innovation which could in any way pervert the primitive faith.¹

That this same spirit is reflected in the social life of the people is something one would naturally expect, in view of the important influence of the church over the entire life of the people. As the father of the Alan princess

¹ Ormanian p. 36.

replied when requested to give the hand of his daughter to Artasches, "From whence shall brave Artasches give thousands upon thousands and ten thousands upon tens of thousands unto the Alans in return for the maiden?" so to-day the first question that is asked when the hand of a young Armenian girl is requested in marriage is "What can he give for his bride?" The practice of wife purchase has only changed in that the required riches are given to the bride instead of to the father of the bride. Occasionally a young man is pressed to the point of mortgaging property in order to obtain the necessary funds, and it has been known that in many such cases the young bride found her treasure gone shortly after her marriage, her master having taken it to pay off his mortgage. So parents arrange for the marriage of their children, the young wife is delivered up to her husband as the obedient and submissive servant, children are baptized after they have scarcely opened their eyes, and church ceremonies are conducted much as they have been for generations.

The self-sufficiency of the Armenian people has been indicated in the repeated failures of missionary religions and foreign cultures to alter appreciably the native folkways and mores. In spite of political subordination to Islam, the Gregorian church has held tenaciously to its ideals and has successfully maintained its independence. The distinctive social tradition,—which includes the political and the religious traditions,—has remained intact in the face of recurrent invasion, vassalage, and persecution. The Armenian will not be assimilated. Death is preferable to the loss of those intangible realities that make the people a distinctive group. When Haic, the patriarchal progenitor of the race, was invited to "soften his hard pride," and to return to the kingdom of the god Bel, the alternative, war, was chosen. In the year 450, when the Persian fire-worshippers invited the Armenians to change their faith, the answer again was war. The reply to the decision of Chalcedon illustrates the same spirit. Likewise through the centuries of the immediate past the ever recurring answer to the Turk has been war. Powerless to assimilate the Armenian people, the Turk has had to annihilate or be annihilated. The self-sufficiency of the people thus reveals itself in the will to maintain the distinctive social tradition, regardless of cost or sacrifice.

The characteristic familism reveals itself not only in the customs of family life, but also in the very nature of the Armenian. In Russian Armenia there is a very active propaganda carried on by Russian girls to secure Armenian husbands because of the domesticity of the latter, which is in striking contrast to the adventurous unfaithfulness of the Russian husband, whose house becomes his prison, from which he therefore flees, leaving his wife and children to shift for themselves. The discontented Russian may be a more attractive lover for his "Wanderlust" and restlessness,

but he is a less attractive husband for the same reason. An Armenian husband belongs in his home, where he lives in the hope that some day he may be the father of a huge household of married sons and grandsons. A young Armenian I know spoke to me of his wish that some day his father might collect the scattered sons and unite them and their families in a single household. This desire is so general among Armenians as to make it evident that the family is the all-important social unit. No reputation is so great as that carried by a good family name, nor is there any so damning as that which goes with a bad family name. And why is the young bride kept silent for years if not to ensure the all-essential family-unity, family-solidarity, and family-continuity,—that is, continuity of family tradition, manners, and customs? And why is the "patria-potestas" well-nigh unlimited if not for precisely the same reason? Nor is the taboo upon the young bride, according to which she may not speak to any young man not a relative during her entire life of marriage, of no significance in this connection. It too precludes family disruption, or blemish on the family name. Divorce and infidelity are very rare, all family differences having no tribunal outside the patriarch, who considers his greatest misfortune to be a lack of family integrity or oneness. Thus a son who has been swayed by Protestantism dares not clash with his father, and has no choice but to run away, while a daughter whose wishes are contrary can be disobedient only at the cost of breaking the family connection, to prevent which she is usually ready to make any sacrifice. All of this is no accident. Forced to dwell within the circle of the family group for seven, eight, or nine months during the year without so much as opening his door, because of the severity of winter, the life of the patriarch is inevitably centered in his household, and therefore also the self of each member is merged into the larger unit. This familism throws additional light on some of the conclusions I have insisted upon, for nothing so fosters conservatism as a substantial family solidarity; what could be more instrumental in passing on the national sentiment, and finally, what could be more favorable to the development of the self-sufficiency, the independence of Armenian character? In speaking of "familism and the well-knit family" Ross says; "Worshippers of the spirit of the hearth, they are more aloof from their fellows, slower therefore to merge with them or be swept from their moorings by them. It seems to be communion by the fire-side rather than communion in the public resort that gives individuality long bracing roots. The withdrawn social self, although it lacks breadth, gains in depth, etc."²

Any socially well-knit people possessing a distinctive social tradition, and characterized by a highly developed national consciousness, may make its contribution to the world's work, if it is given the necessary freedom.

² Ross, *Social Psychology* pp. 88-89.

As the period of the Arsacidae kings brought forth the golden age of Armenian literature, so greater achievements may follow the political independence that is hoped for, and for which Armenians have valiantly struggled. Lord Bryce writes of the Armenian race, "It is the only one of the native races of Western Asia that is capable of restoring productive industry and assured prosperity to the now desolate region that was the earliest home of civilization." In the past, the energy of the people has been wasted in ceaseless conflict. Given a guarantee of territorial integrity, and participation in the affairs of government with the hope of future autonomy, the energies of strife will be diverted to the work of peace. Not until then can the high calling expressed in the words of Lord Bryce be realized.

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